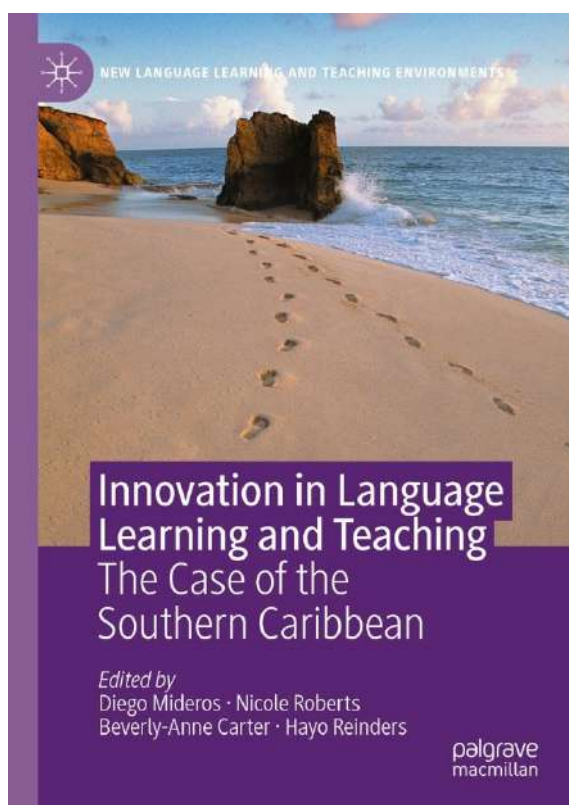
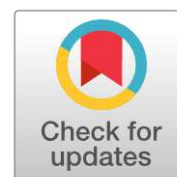


INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING: THE CASE OF THE SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN – BOOK REVIEW

Antony Hoyte-West

Independent scholar, United Kingdom



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 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4410-6520>



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Antony Hoyte-West is an interdisciplinary researcher focusing on linguistics, literature, and translation studies. A qualified translator and conference interpreter from several languages into his native English, he holds a doctorate in linguistics and postgraduate degrees in languages and social sciences from the universities of St Andrews, Oxford, Galway, and Silesia, as well as two diplomas in piano performance. He is the author of 60 publications, several of which are indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. He has presented his research at 41 international conferences in 18 countries, and is on the editorial or advisory boards of 5 peer-reviewed journals.

E-mail: antony.hoyte.west@gmail.com

Among other factors, the impact of colonialism, immigration, and emigration has ensured that the southern Caribbean is a region of diverse populations, religions, and ethnicities. Containing a broad spectrum of geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural differences, the region remains a multilingual space, albeit to varying degrees. Accordingly, *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching: The Case of the Southern Caribbean* is a pioneering edited volume that brings together the pedagogical and scholarly expertise of language teachers and researchers active in the region. The book is edited by four scholars with extensive backgrounds in language teaching, learning, and research: Diego Mideros, Nicole Roberts, and Beverly-Anne Carter are all affiliated to the Centre for Language Learning at The University of West Indies, St Augustine (UWI St Augustine) in Trinidad & Tobago; Hayo Reinders is affiliated to King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) in Bangkok, Thailand.

The reviewed volume is part of a larger book series edited under the stewardship of Hayo Reinders, which to date (as detailed on page 1) has profiled innovative perspectives on language pedagogy in several countries, primarily in Asia. Accordingly, in aiming to offer “a unique perspective from an underrepresented region in the Global South” (p. 2), this book is the first in the series to focus on the Americas, and also on the specific circumstances of small nations. Centring predominantly on university-level provision, the ten informative chapters cover studies examining four languages (English as a Foreign Language, French, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish) in a total of five different polities: the independent nations of Barbados, Guyana, St Lucia, and Trinidad & Tobago, as well as the French overseas department (and region) of Martinique.

The opening chapter is by the book's four co-editors: Diego Mideros, Nicole Roberts, Beverly-Anne Carter, and Hayo Reinders. It offers a succinct geographical and sociocultural overview of the southern Caribbean (useful for those readers unfamiliar with the region) before presenting the situation relating to the teaching and learning of L2 languages in the region, as well as relevant research which has been conducted on the topic. In terms of the book's contents, all of the contributions revolve around innovation, as indicated by its title. Utilising the sociocultural concept of agency, the co-editors highlight that the creation and implementation of the novel strategies presented are “framed under particular conditions and circumstances that both enable and

constrain researchers and practitioners to successfully implement an innovative idea with the aim of improving language learning and teaching” (p. 11).

Chapter 2, by Carmen Céspedes Suárez, focuses on the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among undergraduate students of Spanish at The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill (Barbados). Noting UWI’s transnational operations across the Anglophone Caribbean, Céspedes Suárez contextualises the role of Spanish both in the institutional context as well as in the geopolitical context of the southern Caribbean’s proximity to Spanish-speaking Latin America, in addition to highlighting the importance of learners acquiring the relevant sociocultural knowledge. Using ethnography of communication (see e.g., Farah, 1997), the chapter outlines the design, implementation, and findings of a project which aimed to assess CEFR B1 level students’ intercultural communicative competence over the course of a whole academic year. These results were then compared alongside a series of eight ICC-related objectives pertaining to the evolution of student attitudes, knowledge, and skills in that domain.

The third chapter, by Frank Bardol, presents the findings of an innovative study conducted at the Université des Antilles in Martinique in 2018 and 2019. It outlines an action-research-based blended learning project on the teaching of English pronunciation to students majoring in other subjects (LANSAD, or *Langues pour spécialistes d’autres disciplines*). Using his own theoretical model integrating learner autonomy, digital tools, and pedagogical objectives (Bardol, 2020), the author reports on the implementation and results of the study, providing several core recommendations which – especially given the increased prevalence of blended and remote learning after the COVID-19 pandemic – will be of use to a wide range of educators.

Entitled ‘Teaching Beyond the Classroom: A Project-Based Innovation in a Language Education Course’, Chapter 4 details how problem-based learning was introduced into the “Teaching of Language Arts at the Primary Level” module of the undergraduate degree in primary education at the University of Guyana in Georgetown. In seeking “to transform and contextualise learning in this course by making its

assessment more meaningful and relevant to the real-life realities of teacher practitioners and the needs of students in their classrooms” (p. 63), Pamela Rose charts how the project was designed and implemented over three academic years, with the second and third iterations also integrating Course-based Undergraduate Research (CURE) (see Dolan, 2016) as a core feature. Accordingly, a detailed evaluation of the project is presented, including references to its opportunities and challenges, as well as insightful practical recommendations.

Discussions of the postcolonial context remain highly relevant in the southern Caribbean, and in light of these Ian S. Craig’s chapter discusses the development of an updated statement of mission and values for the Spanish section of UWI Cave Hill. Drawing on various elements which were “personal and professional, institutional and geohistorical” (p. 86), Craig gives a detailed summary of how the statement was conceived and implemented (a full version is appended to the chapter). This analysis is supplemented with information on how these values were incorporated into the onboarding of new staff and students, as well as with regard to moves towards the creation of Caribbean-specific pedagogical materials for the teaching of Spanish. Furthermore, suggestions for further innovations to promote the organic uptake of these values in the institutional and pedagogical contexts are also provided.

Chapter 6 turns to cultural diplomacy within the academic environment, as co-editor Beverly-Anne Carter profiles the Sino-Trinidadian institutional partnership which led to the establishment of the Confucius Institute at UWI St Augustine. Drawing on her experiences as Director of UWI St Augustine’s Centre for Language Learning, Carter provides a unique insider’s perspective on the intricate nature of high-level academic policy and planning, outlining the inception of the project and the important and differing roles of the various stakeholders, before also underlining specific aspects relating to the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese at UWI St Augustine.

The continuing professional development (CPD) of French teachers is the focus of Chapter 7, where Sabrina Lipoff foregrounds the innovative Integrating French as the Language of Exchange (IFLE) programme, which was implemented by the French Embassy in St Lucia and the local Alliance Française. Lipoff situates the study within the

current pedagogical reality relating to the teaching of French as a foreign language across the wider region, noting three “worrying observations” (p. 132): uninterested students, a paucity of teacher training for French as a foreign language, and teachers’ own insecurities about their level of French proficiency. Accordingly, Lipoff details the creation and implementation of a dedicated online CPD programme for teachers of French, noting participant responses and also proposing potential areas for improvement and future work.

Professional development of a different kind is highlighted in the co-authored chapter by co-editor Diego Mideros and Paola Palma, which revolves around the innovative application of learning beyond the classroom (see Benson, 2011; Reinders, 2020) in the context of the creation of a bespoke blended-learning Spanish course for the staff of a local airline. With both authors affiliated to the Centre for Language Learning at UWI St Augustine, the chapter provides a comprehensive panorama of the stages involved in developing and planning a customised corporate programme within a university context. This includes detailed information regarding the remit, the scope of the course, the online platform, tutor selection, and the delivery method. This factual information is supplemented by insightful qualitative and quantitative findings from various perspectives, including from the course academic leader, tutors, and participants.

In the penultimate chapter (Chapter 9), co-editor Beverly-Anne Carter, Avian Daly, and Mathilde Dallier present the findings of an online study conducted during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic among students of UWI St Augustine’s Centre for Language Learning. With the mandatory transfer from face-to-face to online learning occurring whilst the 2019/2020 academic year was still in progress, the study centred on a particular communication-based L2 course that had previously been taught exclusively face-to-face and did not have online pedagogical resources associated with it. Accordingly, the study sought to ascertain learners’ perceptions on the move to emergency remote learning through examining short reflective essays submitted on the topic. As a consequence, the qualitative insights gained provide a useful barometer of learner perception regarding this dramatic pedagogical shift in the context of an unprecedented global crisis.

Written jointly by the book's four co-editors, Chapter 10 concludes the volume as a whole. This final contribution acts as a capstone which critically analyses the innovations presented in each of the preceding chapters, comparing and contrasting them with each other in terms of the outcomes, challenges, and implications, and deftly teases out points of synergy to highlight and discuss important commonalities. Building on this detailed discussion and analysis, the work closes with a series of valuable recommendations for future research and practice.

As this review has demonstrated, *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching: The Case of the Southern Caribbean* showcases the rich possibilities for novel research on the teaching and learning of L2 languages in the southern Caribbean context. Yet it is crucial to underline that this groundbreaking volume will surely also have distinct appeal far beyond the region. The innovations and experiences presented provide valuable and detailed first-hand perspectives, guidance, and analysis which can of course be applied to other geographies, languages, and learning modalities. In addition to providing an excellent point of departure for comparative studies, this book will be a crucial resource for teachers and scholars in all areas of language pedagogy and practice, including the teaching and learning of specialised languages, translator and interpreter training etc. This is particularly so given that, in common with other educational professionals worldwide, language educators are currently grappling with the shift to new modes of learning, including the concomitant requirements for digital literacy (see e.g., Tomczyk & Fedeli, 2022) as well as the ongoing influence that new AI technologies will doubtlessly exert over the coming years. Indeed, as highlighted in the book's opening chapter, the four co-editors "hope that this volume inspires local and regional L2 teachers and practitioners to engage in more L2 research that documents innovations regardless of how big or small they may seem" (pp. 17-18), noting such initiatives could certainly be beneficial for the whole region. Indeed, it is to be hoped that active "practisearchers" (Gile, 1994, p. 150), as well as those considering embarking on research in the domain, will find this volume a fount of inspiration for further innovative work on language learning and teaching across the Caribbean and elsewhere.

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Handling Editor:
 Stan Bogdanov, PhD
 New Bulgarian University