The rich variety of innovative approaches to language learning represented here points to one of the main characteristics of the learning environment today, namely the ever-expanding choice in strategies and resources that fit particular contexts. The contributions in this collection are, in that sense, tremendously helpful as they lay out what the innovation is and how it is used, but also are forthright about both the benefits and potential issues. While many of the innovations discussed here involve the use of technology, we should keep in mind that the newest and greatest technologies are not necessarily those most compatible with pedagogical needs and best practices.

One of the most exciting aspects of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) today is the opportunity afforded by extramural learning resources. These are opportunities for extending learning beyond the classroom or for self-directed autonomous learning (see learning without a teacher). This process offers informal, implicit language learning through interacting in activities such as social media, multiplayer games, online affinity groups, or extensive viewing of videos. Some learners may favor a structured approach, such as that offered through participation in an LMOOC, which provides a formal instructional environment online along with peer learner contacts. Interactions in the Second Language (L2) online with content, individuals, and communities can supply considerably more exposure to authentic L2 language than is available in the classroom or provided by coursebooks. The language learning potential of informal resources, such as social or streaming media, is enhanced by the emotional resonance often involved. Learning through wonder, which leverages children’s natural curiosity about everyday objects into language learning, similarly can evoke emotional responses and enhance longer-term learning. Individual investment in learning is an aspect too of action-oriented

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approaches to language learning, involving learners in meaningful, real-life situations, often leading to highly personal multimedia projects.

An important aspect of L2 learning opportunities online is their multimodal character. That is particularly evident in digital media; where texting, social media posts, and other content containers allow for the seamless integration of texts, audio, and images. Using all available modes of communication to enhance narrative effectiveness is a hallmark of digital storytelling. Online gaming is typically multimodal as well, with often highly personal engagement often leading to interactions with other gamers beyond the gameplay itself (see gamification). Another multimodal activity that takes learners outside the classroom is the use of linguistic landscape, in which students are typically exposed to different genres and modes of presentation, most often in an urban environment. Another avenue for place-based learning is the use of augmented reality learning. This most often involves students in task-based learning, with goals such as solving a mystery or creating a cultural guidebook. This presents an engaging opportunity for combining the digital with the real world.

In engaging with the outside world, either through physical displacement or virtually, students are likely to encounter multiple languages, a phenomenon particularly evident in online environments. Translanguaging calls for new kinds of multilingual and multimodal literacies; it is helpful in developing multiliteracies for learners to gain metalinguistic awareness, understanding that language learning goes beyond a static set of grammar rules and vocabulary knowledge. One of the tools helpful in that process is for students to engage in translation turn activities. Translating is fundamentally a process of mediation, which exposes cultural fault lines, along with differing linguistic conventions and pragmatic behaviors. The use of digital corpora can also be helpful in gaining metalinguistic knowledge through having students induce patterns of usage through analysis of contextual examples.

While language learning using informal online resources can provide powerful learning opportunities for independent learners, an instructed learning environment can leverage those resources – along with the mentoring and organizing role of
the teacher – to provide an optimal language learning environment. Language educators can model and guide the use of online resources in their classroom (or online). Teachers might take advantage of automatic speech recognition to have students experiment with speaking to machines or using chatbots to speak with machines. That can involve use of virtual assistants which can serve to practice pronunciation, test intelligibility, and engage in question and response.

Technology advances today supply other opportunities for enhancing oral and aural skills. One could take advantage of the ubiquity of mobile phones to have students record audio or short video clips to be shared with peers (see technology-facilitated oral homework). One of the methods that has proven highly effective in leading students to converse in the target language is virtual exchange. This involves students in communicating, either one-on-one or in small groups, with counterparts abroad. Virtual exchanges offer the valuable experience of engaging in real conversations in the L2. The interactions can build awareness of the importance of strategic and pragmatic competencies, the ability to use language appropriate to the context, as well as to be able to work around linguistic roadblocks. Multilateral virtual exchange often involves dialog facilitation through the use of conversation facilitators, who assist with both linguistic and cultural issues which may arise. That experience can bring learners into contact with cultural ‘Others’ and assist in the process of decolonizing the languages curriculum. In fact, an awareness of social justice issues has become increasingly recognized as an important element of instructed SLA.

One of the issues to consider with innovative approaches to language learning is how to assess student learning. There has been a growing awareness that it would be helpful to have both non-traditional methods of assessment as well as a variety of sources, whenever possible. That can translate in to continuous, iterative assessments (rather than big exams), the use of holistic assessment (see comparative judgment), or implementing ipsative assessment, judging student performance not on pre-determined criteria, but based on their incremental development. One of the recent innovations which can serve to document achievement as well as to motivate is the use of open badges. Other options include the use of portfolios, learning journals, or evidence from participation in
discussion forums or other online activities. These and other assessment options and teaching practices, along with technology integration, offer many different approaches for teachers to consider. Professional development and collegial collaboration can provide (through TeachMeets, for example) support and knowledge through an exchange of experiences.

Which pedagogical innovation presented here may prove effective depends on the learning and teaching context. Implementations will need to be adapted to local conditions. It is in the nature of innovations that not all will be successful, but experimentation and risk-taking are as much a characteristic of good pedagogy as they are of effective language learning.