The Common European Framework of Reference and the Teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language

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In 2001 the Council of Europe published the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages,* an official document destined to become the most influential achievement of European language policy of recent decades. The document—hereafter referred to as the CEFR—was then translated into 40 languages[1], both European and non-European, including Arabic (CEFR 2008), Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Turkish.

The CEFR was conceived for plurilingual and intercultural education; however, it rapidly left the circle of specialists and spread to a wide audience. It began circulating in draft form in 1996, even though many of its ideas originated during previous decades. In fact, one can count many landmarks and milestones in European language policy between the ratification of the European Cultural Convention[2] of 1954 and the publication of the CEFR. During this time span, European language experts

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[1]. Arabic, Albanian, Armenian, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, Friulian, Galician, Georgian, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Macedonian Language, Moldovan, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian (Iekavian version), Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Ukrainian.
Retrieved from: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/List_Cadre_traduc.doc

[2]. Article 2 of the European Cultural Convention officially inaugurates the language policy as it states: "Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible: (a) encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory; and (b) endeavour to promote the study of its language or languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory" (CoE 1954). Retrieved from: http://www.coe.int/it/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168006457e

gathered in order to evaluate the state of the field of modern languages and discusscrucial themesrelating to language learning and teaching.

This chapter will first briefly present the historical background of European language policy and provide a general overview of the main documents and meetings that shaped it during the last fifty years. It will then examine some conceptual issues of the CEFR, together with some of the potential improvements that its use can bring to the field of Arabic language learning and teaching. This chapter will also draw the reader's attention to some crucial principles (i.e. mutual understanding, efficient learning, etc.) contained in the document, which will be helpful in improving the aforementioned field. The teaching of many languages, including Arabic, has experienced modification in recent years, and faces challenges in a market where language courses are increasingly being legitimated by official certifications, formality and efficiency. Presently, the CEFR seems to be a good tool for the teaching and learning of Arabic—a language that must be considered for the peculiarity of its socio-linguistic panorama, and one in which diglossia plays a key role.

1. History and development of the CEFR
1.1. The transformation of a continent

The European Economic Community (EEC) has gone through many transformations since its establishment in 1957. These changes brought not only territorial enlargements of the EEC—renamed the European Union, or EU, after the Maastricht Treaty[1]— but also the birth of a sense of European unity, through the communion and sharing of common values by citizens no longer divided by the political boundaries of individual nation-states. Thus, when the euro, the new European currency, was officially adopted in 2002, politics began to convey and broadcast feelings of European unity, which were represented through the motto "We are in Europe" (or "siamo in Europa", "Wir sind in Europa", "nós somos a Europa", etc.).

Over the last 50 years, the Old Continent has witnessed a radical transformation, which has brought about the formation of a macro-regional territory "united in diversity," as the EU's motto states. The macro-region has distinguished itself with a highly distinctive trait, from

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1. Called also "Treaty on European Union" (TEU). It was signed on February 7,1992 and entered into force on November 1, 1993.

the linguistic point of view : the peculiarity of its language panorama, which is the subject of study and debate by scholars both within EU agencies and in the field of modern languages.

1.2. The beginnings of European language policy

Among the first documents on modern languagesissued by the Council of Europe one can find *The Threshold Level in a European Unit/Credit System for Modern Language Learning by Adults* — commonly referred to as the *Threshold Level (T-Level)* —, which is a project set up 14 years after the foundation of the EEC in 1957. The project aimed to develop a unit/credit system for adult language learning and was characterized by a highly significant connection with the socio-historical context and setting in which it was created. The *T-Level* was developed during the 1970s and 1980s, in a region rich in linguistic diversity, as Europe was expanding politically and peoples were choosing the path of convergence and cooperation while working to build European common visions. For this reason, one can define the project as a pure expression of the political-institutional contingencies that characterized the EECstates of those years.

In this instance, it is interesting to report what Jan van Ek—the author of the *T-Level*—pointed out one year after the publication of the document. The passage below places the socio-historical description sketched above in a clearer context:

> Although at times it may seem as if the European community is characterized by diversity rather than unity, there are broad areas where an increasing convergence of views and attitudes may be observed. In these areas the same ideas tend to develop simultaneously and in similar fashion in several places in different countries, so that it would seem to be justified to speak of European development rather than a multitude of national ones (van EK: 1976).

Europe was changing, and with it the relations between its peoples. The triggering event that led the *T-Level* coordinators to start the testing phase of the project was the belief that "in the middle term, (…) very large numbers of people [would] discover in adult life the urgent need to be able to use a foreign language they have either never had the opportunity to study, or else have forgotten" (van Ek 1975).

Therefore, the responsibility of society would be "to make available to them efficient facilities to learn the language they need for the purposes for which they need it (...), especially in the framework of permanent education" (van Ek 1975).

1.3. The 1990s: The CEFR's incubation

After the *T-Level* was published in 1975, the release of translations were delayed in some European countries, such as Italy, where Nora Galli De' Paratesi released her *Livello soglia* only in 1981, followed four years later by the Dutch version *Drempelniveau: Nederlands als vreemde taal*(Wynant 1985). It should also be pointed out that the success of this document led to its adaptation to non-European languages also, such as Ellie Kallas' *Yatabi lebnaaniyyi: Un "Livello soglia" per l'apprendimento del neo-arabo libanese*, a version for Lebanese Arabic, published in Italy in 1990 (Kallas 1995 [1990]). This book represents a scientific effort that integrated a colloquial variety of Arabic into a major symbol of the contemporary European language philosophy. It addressed problems and issues that are still discussed today in connection with other tools, e.g.target learners, diglossia, language variety and approaches for the implementation of the *T-Level* in Arabic. Moreover, the 1980s saw the main attention shifting from the document itself to "the application of the threshold level concept (...) more generally to the modernisation of language teaching in schools across the continent" (cf. Trim 2012: 27). However, the years to come witnessed a crucial development of European language policy.

One fundamental step of the European policy on languages is the Rüschlikon Intergovernmental Symposium, which took place in the little Swiss town of Rüschlikonbetween November 10–16, 1991. The Symposium was entitled "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: Objectives, Evaluation, Certification." During the meeting, many discussions were held on the themes of language proficiency, communicative language competencies and even the creation of a European Language Portfolio (in which each individual could enter their experiences and qualifications in the area of modern foreign languages) (cf. CoE 1992). However, what makes the Symposium a watershed in the European policy on languages is the fact that—during the meeting—the Swiss delegation proposed the creating of a common European framework of reference aimed at helping people at all levels

of language learning. Moreover, it was suggested that the framework could offer the opportunity to achieve objectives that represent the aims of European policies, e.g. international mobility, linguistic and cultural diversity, mutual understanding, tolerance and closer co-operation. For these reasons, the year 1991 can be considered a turning point, as it paved the way to the development of the CEFR 10 years later.

Also of note are the recommendations *R (82) 18* and *R (98) 6* of the Council of Europe, which were issued before and after the aforementioned Symposium, in the years 1982 and 1998 respectively. The objectives contained in them are similar to those expressed during the Rüschlikon meeting: fostering co-operation between governmental and non-governmental institutions in the field of modern foreign languages (e.g.development oflearning and assessment methods), facilitating mutual understanding, and "communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility (...) and overcoming prejudice and discrimination" (CoE 1982: 1).

The 1990s witnessed other significant events, including the conference entitled "Language Learning for a New Europe" and the Second Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe. The former took place between April 15-18, 1997, and it is considered of paramount importance, as it represents the final meeting of the "Learning for European Citizenship" project. This project, led by the Council of Cultural Cooperation, favored the creation of the CEFR and the European Language Portfolio. Soon after, the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe was held in Strasbourg on October10-11 of the same year. During the Summit, the principle of democratic citizenship, which was considered a priority educational objective, was stressed (*cf.* CoE2001: 4). This in turn was interrelated to "a further objective pursued in recent projects, namely: to promote methods of modern language teaching which will strengthen independence of thought, judgement and action, combined with social skills and responsibility" (*ibid.*).

These events and meetings, together with the progress made by the Council of Europe in the field of Language Teaching (from the communicative approach to the improvements related to trainers and teachers training [*cf.* CoE 1998: 1]), have enormously enriched scientific research in the field of modern languages as well as leading to the publication of the CEFR in 2001.

1.4. 2001-today: From publication to global success

As explained above, the CEFR grew out of a debate rooted in the 1970s and 1980s, which continued throughout a series of conferences and meetings that took place during the 1990s. Today, the policies that stem from the CEFR still influence both the sector of modern languages and the lives of those who deal with foreign languages, reaching a wide audience (*cf.* Beacco 2016). Associations, institutes, public bodies and private language schools started to update their courses according to the new CEFR criteria, producing improvements in the field of language planning, testing, certification and skills measurement. The CEFR allowed all European language teachers to understand each other when discussing the field of teaching and evaluation, and it also helps them establish common language objectives for the foreign language class. The "six levels approach" (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) became a trend in foreign language course promotion, since it was and is still today a synonym of reliability. As a result, since the adoption of this approach, language courses and textbooks have displayed these levels on educational materials and book covers.

The six levels approach can be considered one of the most successful and popular output of the CEFR, along with the language activities descriptors. In order to explain the approach, we consult the CEFR:

> There does appear in practice to be a wide, though by no means universal, consensus on the number and nature of levels appropriate to the organisation of language learning and the public recognition of achievement. It seems that an outline framework of six broad levels gives an adequate coverage of the learning space relevant to European language learners for these purposes. (…) When one looks at these six levels, however, one sees that they are respectively higher and lower interpretations of the classic division into basic, intermediate and advanced. Also, some of the names given to Council of Europe specifications for levels have proved resistant to translation (e.g. Waystage, Vantage). The scheme therefore proposed adopts a 'hyper-text' branching principle, starting from an initial division into three broad levels – A, B and C (CoE 2001: 22).

Each level is divided into two sublevels. The first level is identified by the letter A (meaning Basic User) and is subdivided into A1 (Breakthrough) and A2 (Waystage). The second level is B (Independent User) which is divided into B1 (Threshold) and B2 (Vantage), while the third level is C (Proficient User), subdivided into C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) and C2 (Mastery). The organization of this model is called the "branching approach" since it recalls the pattern of treesforking intosmaller and smaller branches.

Each sublevel can be supplemented by "non-criterion levels" called "plus levels" (e.g. A1.2, B2+, C1.2.1, etc.). These "plus levels" are considered "cut-off points" (CoE 2001: 32), and are one of the key elements of the branching approach along with the six sublevels. The advantage of a branching approach is that "a common set of levels and/or descriptors can be 'cut' into practical local levels at different points by different users to suit local needs and yet still relate back to a common system" (*ibid.*). This flexible branching approach is therefore a system that lets every user of the CEFR adapt the common reference levels scheme to their specific training/educational needs.

The CEFR and its six levels approach have achieved resounding success not only among language experts, but also with foreign language teachers (Martyniuk and Noijons 2007), as they fostered new developments and evolution in the field of modern languages, including standardizations and adaptations of language qualification systems (e.g. scales of levels, proficiency tests, etc.) to the CEFR model (see e.g. Alderson 2006; CoE 2009; Noijons 2011; Hell 2016). Theoretical discussions followed one another over the years, both within and outside Europe; this led to the globalization of education policy and the so-called "borrowing and lending" among states and their education interests (*cf.* Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) of which the CEFR represents an example (see e.g. Byram and Parmenter 2012).

2. The Arabic language and the CEFR
2.1. The Arabic language in the 21st century

In the past two centuries the study of Arabic has gone through several modifications, which affected both the field of language teaching and the language itself (Versteegh 2006). However, it is only in the 1960s that Arabic began to be considered a global language. As Nielsen (2009: 147) states, "Arabic has developed from being a scholarly language studied for religious and, at times, commercial reasons in the 16th and 17th centuries to serving as one of the main foreign and second languages in

L'arabe langue étrangère. Didactique et traduction. Approche pragmatique

The Common European Framework of Reference and the Arabic Language

the 21st century."Today, Arabic is one of the official languages of the United Nations and the African Union, besides being the only official language of the Arab League.

There has been a dramatic increase in university Arabic courses' enrollment rates since the 1970s, a trend that continues today, albeit in an uneven way. As Nielsen (2009) reports, recent figures from American universities show an increase [in Arabic language course enrollments] of 92.5 percent between 1998 and 2002 – from 5,505 to 10,584 students (Welles 2004) – and a similar development has taken place in Europe. (…) 1990s saw an important influx of heritage learners, i.e. students of Arab background or Muslims (…) The percentage of this new group of students varies, of course, according to national and local conditions; some European universities report that they had up to 75 percent of new students with a Middle Eastern background in 2005 (Nielsen entre 2006).

Moreover, after the political and economic changes of the 1970s and 1980s, the recent trend has been for young learners to study of languages and cultures that have recently acquired more significance with increasing globalization. As a means of getting ahead in the business world, young people have begun to studylanguages such as Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese and Arabic more frequently.

The study of Arabic, however, presents a series of problems, which stem fromits socio-linguistic panorama. This last is characterized by the coexistence of two varieties of Arabic, one high, literary and formal (*al-'arabiyya al-Fuṣḥā* or *al-mu'āṣira*), and the other low, informal and usually spoken ('āmmiyya); a situation known as diglossia. This is the main reason why the Arabic language class can be considered a challenge. In fact, the diglossic situation of Arabic has often led educators to make choices in the curricula that affect students' proficiency. The heart of the matter does not lie in the alleged difficulty and intricacy of the language, which is relative according to Stevens (2006), but in the fact that "it is often very demotivating for learners [of Modern Standard Arabic, the literary variety] to realize that the language they have spent a lot of energy learning cannot be applied directly in spoken communication, making it very difficult indeed to understand what Arab speakers say to them" (Nielsen 2009: 152). Therefore, there is a possibility that offering only Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) courses not only demotivates students in their language learning (Palmer 2007), but also increases

the likelihood that they will dropout of language study altogether (i.e. Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbarand Shohamy 2004). In fact, "motivation influences academic performance, which in turn affects a person's self-esteem" (Bennet).

In order to address this problem, a solution known as the "integrated approach" (in Arabic *al-ṭarīqa al-takāmuliyya*) was proposed by scholars such as Munther Younes, who is considered its major proponent. The integrated approach is a teaching philosophy widely used nowadays in the United States and beyond; it combines the study of MSA and a variety of colloquial Arabic (CA), a choice that reflects the diglossic nature of Arabic and the socio-linguistic realities of the Arab world in the most accurate and natural way possible (see e.g.Younes 1990, 1995, 2010; al-Batal and Belnap 2006; Nielsen 2012; Chekayri entre 2014).

The birth of the integrated approach should beconsidered as part of a wider phenomenon: the specialization of teaching methods, which were subjected to constant changes as a consequence of the political and economic transformations after the Second World War (Titone entre 1980). Language teaching is a practical and problem solving-oriented discipline; it is characterized by a pendulum-like movement, a continuous adaptation, which is not the result of changing fashions, but is modified and shaped by the changes imposed by socio-historical factors (*cf.* Serragiotto 2004; Balboni entre 2008).

2.2. The CEFR: A universal model?

The efficiency and high level of reliability of the European language policy's outputs, its results and research, together with the recent trends in the study of Arabic, have created a brand new perspective for Arabic language learning and teaching. The aim of the present section is to give insight into the adaptability of the CEFR to Arabic, and the usability and benefits that the former can bring to the field of Arabic language learning and teaching.

The CEFR was translated into Arabic by the Goethe-Institut Ägypten in 2008 (CEFR 2008). Eight years later, the process of adoption by language institutes is still in progress in the Arab world. Even though Norrbom (2014) reports that the CEFR is gaining ground in the region, especially in the Gulf States, there is little evidence of the CEFR's usage and implementation in Arabic, from either the theoretical or practical

L'arabe langue étrangère. Didactique et traduction. Approche pragmatique

The Common European Framework of Reference and the Arabic Language

point of view (de Graaf, Richtersand de Ruiter 2012). As Soliman (2016) pointed out, at present, implementations of the CEFR in Arabic are based on individual efforts.

Some scholars have begun to dedicate their attention to incorporation of the CEFR into Arabic language education in recent years (i.e. Toonen 2009; Khalifa 2011; Amin, Sheb, Abd El Salam 2012; Facchin 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Higueras 2012; Runge 2012; Aguilar 2014; Norrbom 2014; Pashova 2014; Suçin 2015; Soliman 2016). Moreover, in 2011 the "First Biennial CEFR Conference: the CEFR and its Implications for the Gulf States"was organized at HCT Dubai Men's College. The conference was a joint event by the University of Cambridge's Cambridge English Language Assessment and the Higher Colleges of Technology of the United Arab Emirates. During the meeting, scholars from Europe and the Middle East discussed the implications of the CEFR for the Gulf region, especially with regard to English and the CEFR's implementation in Arabic. It was only in 2014 that the first conference on the relationship between the CEFR and Arabic was organized in Montreal by the Université du Québec à Montréal. The conference was entitled "Le CECRL et la didactique de l'arabe: bilan et horizons" and gathered scholars from Canada, Europe and the United States, who discussed the implications of potential implementations of the CEFR in Arabic both from the theoretical and practical points of view (Chamsine 2014; Facchin 2014a; Labban 2014; Khalfallah 2014).

Cases in which the CEFR is employed for didactical purposes are still scant, despite the fact that it could favor the creation of textbooks, guide-lines, standardized exams and certifications, and foster the creation of curricula organized into defined proficiency levels. Not only would ap-plying the CEFR's six levels approach to Arabic encourage the creation of more competitive language courses in the training market, it would also, as a consequence, foster the spread of pluralist knowledge of Arab culture. Therefore, the present section also aims to theoretically moti-vate and provide practical explanation sof the reasons why one should apply the CEFR's proposed model to the Arabic language. Although the CEFR is not the only language qualification system available (e.g. ACT-FL 1989, 2012; Alosh 2010; Chekayri 2010), it represents a good tool for this purpose, with rich potentialities and implementation possibilities. The improvements that the CEFR can bring to language teaching are numerous. For example, it can boost efficiency in the field of Arabic

language learning and teaching. Adapting the CEFR in Arabic education, though, raises a series of conceptual issues, which are correlated with the diglossic nature of the language and its varieties, namely MSA and CA. The coexistence of two separate, mostly functionally different varieties of Arabic poses some challenges. The result of the CEFR application to Arabic would be a peculiar case that should be analyzed. In order to clarify the matter, we may take into account the theory that Victoria Aguilar included in the proceedings of ArabeLE 2012, an international conference on Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) held in Madrid, and further explored in her 2014 article. Aguilar (2014) advocates the simultaneous teaching of MSA and the Moroccan Arabic dialect (MA). With this in mind, she takes the CEFR's "5 language skills" and applies them to the language testing of the two varieties: MSA and MA. According to Aguilar, not all skills can be tested in each of the two varieties. Thus, she affirms that listening (*al-fahm al-šafawī*) and reading (*al-fahm al-kitābī*) should be tested both in MSA and MA, while writing (*al-taʿbīr al-kitābī*) only in MSA, speaking (*al-taʿbīr al-šafawī*) and interacting (*al-tafāʿul al-šafawī*) only in MA.

Furthermore, the flexibility of the six levels approach allows discussing another possible way of applying the CEFR to Arabic in practical terms. As often happens in beginner levels of Arabic, learners need to learn a new way to read and write, unless they are already acquainted with the Arabic alphabet. Therefore, in Arabic language teaching, the Basic User level, level A—and specifically the A1 and A2 levels—should be subdivided into plus levels such as A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, etc., since learners usually beginto study the language from a lower starting point (Higueras 2012; Facchin 2014a). In essence, some communicative language competencies (phonological, orthographic and orthoepic) are called into question. Beginner learners of Arabic in Europe and in America are requiredto pronounce sounds that are often distant from their source language, specifically articulating them and producing a correct pronunciation from their written form. In this situation, an advantage of the CEFR six levels approach is that teachers can easily implement its structure and multiply its branches, creating more refined sublevels. "With a flexible branching scheme such as that proposed [in the CEFR], institutions can develop the branches relevant to them to the appropriate degree of delicacy in order to situate the levels used in their system in terms of the common framework" (CoE 2001: 32). For example, "a (...) system for adult evening classes in which

L'arabe langue étrangère. Didactique et traduction. Approche pragmatique

The Common European Framework of Reference and the Arabic Language

the provision of visible progress at low levels is felt necessary, could develop the Basic User stem to produce a set of perhaps six milestones with finer differentiation at A2 (Waystage) where large numbers of learners would be found" (CoE 2001: 32.).Hence, the flexible branching approach, together with the practical cases analyzed above, confirm that the CEFR has a "universal slant": "the establishment of a set of common reference points in no way limits how different sectors in different pedagogic cultures may choose to organize or describe their system of levels and modules"(*ibid.* 23).

The potential improvements to Arabic education resulting from the adoption of the CEFR would not only be practical; they also apply to the theoretical level, including such topics as reflections on language policies, mutual understanding, language objectives, teaching efficiency and suitable methods and materials. The CEFR lists a series of general aims, which can be discussed in connection with the teaching and learning of Arabic. The language is studied in Europe not only for cultural or professional purposes, but also as a means of understanding the culture of migrants of Arab origin who have moved to the continent in recent decades and are today an integral part of European society.The following paragraphs intend to demonstrate from a theoretical perspective why the CEFR model should be adopted for the learning and teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language. Five reasons for this will be presented below: (1) mutual understanding, (2) efficient learning, (3) worthwhile and realistic language objectives will be discussed individually, and (4) developing suitable methods, materials and (5) evaluation instruments will be grouped together.

2.2.1. Mutual understanding

One of the general aims of the CEFR is encouraging mutual understanding. This aim originally stems from the *Recommendation R (82) 18* preamble; it fosters the promotion of European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation,and encourages working to overcome prejudice and discrimination (*cf.* CoE 2001: 2). Even if the aim refers only to the peoples of Europe and states that "only through a better knowledge of European modern languages (…) it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote" the aforementioned objectives, one should consider the fact that contemporary Europe

is home to many migrant groups who speak non-European native languages (e.g. Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu, etc.), despite the fact that these are not official languages of the EU. A study conducted by Vasileva for Eurostat—the statistical office of the EU—in 2011 reports that the total number of foreign residents in Europe reached 32.5 million in 2010, which represented 6.5% of the population of the EU27 zone[1]. Of these, 12.3 million came from a European Union member state, while 20.2 millionwere third-country nationals, namely citizens of non-EU countries. The recent figures published by Eurostat in 2015 witness a slight decrease in non-EU citizens, who numbered only 19.8 million in 2014 (Eurostat 2015). Since non-EU citizens are today integral part of Europe and their number is sizable, we should consider their heritage language(s), namely the language used by a minority group, not as mother tongue, being different from the language present outside the community context. As a consequence, the co-operation and mutual understanding mentioned both in *R (82) 18* and in the CEFR can be understood to exist not only between EU-born residents (i.e. Germans and Italians, British and Czech people, etc.) but also between EU- and foreign-born ones[ii] (e.g. British and Pakistani people, Germans citizens and the Turkish migrant community in Germany, French and Tunisians, Italians and Chinese, etc.).

To this end, one should underline the fact that the aforementioned migrant groups have been carrying not only their cultures and experiences into Europe, but also their languages, which often representan important identity factor. Therefore, learning and teaching migrants' languages can enhance mutual understanding, integration, social inclusion and co-operation within Europe. As professor of foreign language teaching Giovanni Freddi stated, "language is the precipitate of a culture," and in this light, learning migrants' languages can open the way to the study of a different culture, which is not European, but alien.

Furthermore, one can affirm that the study of several foreign languages can help both to achieve personal enrichment and to overcome prejudice, discrimination, preconceived ideas and stereotypes, which are dangerous and damaging in the globalization era:

It can be claimed (...) that while the knowledge of one foreign language and culture does not always lead to going beyond what may be ethnocentric in relation to the 'native' language and culture, and may even have the opposite effect (it is not uncommon for the learning of one language and contact with one foreign culture to reinforce stereotypes and preconceived ideas rather than reduce them), a knowledge of several languages is more likely to achieve this, while at the same time enriching the potential for learning.

In this context the promotion of respect for the diversity of languages and of learning more than one foreign language in school is significant. It is not simply a linguistic policy choice at an important point in the history of Europe, for example, nor even (...) a matter of increasing future opportunities for young people competent in more than two languages. It is also a matter of helping learners: [1] to construct their linguistic and cultural identity through integrating into it a diversified experience of otherness; [2] to develop their ability to learn through this same diversified experience of relating to several languages and cultures (CoE 2001: 134).

In order to avoid xenophobia and ultra-nationalist backlashes, one should no longerlabel foreigners as corruptors of the traditional values of a given region (*cf.* Serragiotto 2004: 54). Foreigners are individuals potentially able to enrich the host country and its people(s), thanks to their previous experiences, values, cognitive skills and abilities (*cf.* Serragiotto 2004: 54). In this instance, the assertion by Serragiotto recalls what is declared both in the preamble of *Recommendation R (82) 18* and in the CEFR's first pages, that is, the aim "to achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other peoples and of their cultural heritage" (CoE 2001: 3).

At this point in time, each of us should ask ourselves: what is Europe, if not a kaleidoscope of different peoples and cultures? If it is true that the CEFR can be applied to Arabic, the objectives mentioned above will pave the way to integration and understanding of each other. This will also allow the aversion of "the dangers that might result from the marginalization of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe" (CoE 2001: 4), which is one of the general aims of *Recommendation R (98) 6*.

2.2.2. Efficient learning

Until now, we have been mainly analyzing the social advantages originating from the application of the official aims of the CEFR and the recommendations issued by the Council of Europe. Among those advantages are the enriching effects of foreign cultures on European society. In particular, we have been considering Arabic language and culture, as well as Middle Eastern and foreign-born residents settling in Europe.

We would like to shift now to analyzing the areas of Arabic language education needing improvement,and how the CEFR and other European documents can help with those areas of need.For this reason, we re-examine *R (82) 18* and its general measures, where various aims are enumerated. One of them proposes to "promote, encourage and support the efforts of teachers and learners at all levels to apply in their own situation the principles of the construction of language-learning systems" (CoE 1982: 3). Moreover, this general aim contains some specific objectives that the creators of the CEFR wished would be realized. One of them is "basing language teaching and learning on the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of learners" (*ibid.*).This should not be understood as saying that lessons must be tailored to every single need of thelearners. On the contrary, the creation of curricula that are based on the class' real learning needs must be encouraged. Learning needs can be surveyed through an aptitude questionnaire, which can help teachers determine the students' main interests, language levels and future expectations from the course. Once this information is obtained, the teacher can create solid learning programthat takes into account the results of the questionnaireand the students' motivations, characteristics, talents and resources.

The concepts expressed above are reiterated and confirmed by Ellie Kallas who tells us in his work *Qui est arabophone?* that "l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère doit d'abord préciser les besoins des apprenants, quelle variété linguistique enseigner et les besoins objectifs dont il faut s'inspirer pour les satisfaire"[1] (Kallas 1999: 75). Furthermore, Kallas identifies a series of elements that learners should specify in case they are asked to define their learning needs and expectations. In this instance, it should be pointed out that these elements are similar to those identified by the coordinators of the *T-Level* project, namely the descrip-

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1. My translation: "when teaching a foreign language one should specify learners' training needs, the language variety to be taught and the objective needs on which one takes inspiration in order to satisfy them".

L'arabe langue étrangère. Didactique et traduction. Approche pragmatique

The Common European Framework of Reference and the Arabic Language

tive categories of situations. These categories are: domains, language activities and varieties (e.g. written and oral register), learners' social and psychological roles, themes of interest and the language level that learners expect to achieve by the end of the course. Kallas finishes by applying the *T-Level* model to Arabic, and by warning readers of the peculiarities of the Arabic language panorama:

> l'enseignement de l'arabe classique est indispensable pour ceux qui s'occupent de la tradition arabo-musulmane: islamisants, juristes, etc.; alors que l'enseignement de "l'arabe moderne" est utile pour ceux qui s'intéressent à la communication référentielle. Une variété standard mixte des parlers nationaux, ou encore un hybride d'arabe et de néo-arabe, et qu'il ne faut jamais enseigner, parce qu'elle n'a pas de corpus déterminé et n'est pas un système bien défine; le corpus linguistique doit être sélectionné à l'intérieur d'une variété nationale appartenant à un registre moyen-élevé ou moyen-bas, selon l'objectif choisi[1]
> (Kallas 1999: 75).

In the end, we would like to conclude with the following observation: the variety of Arabic chosen for a given course (Modern Standard or a variety of colloquial Arabic) should firstly reflect the socio-linguistic realities of the Arab world, and secondly agree with learners' needs and expectations. As a consequence, the purpose of the CEFR's "efficient learning" aim, and the best practices in the field of TAFL (such as the integrated approach), are auto-executive filesthat give us the opportunity to rethink the curricula and the educational syllabi of Arabic language courses. It should be clear by now that the approach to the matter discussed above will not solve the enduring phenomenon of diglossia in the Arab world, but it will allow students to enjoy and benefit from their studies thanks to real, precise and efficient learning objectives, without making them feel frustrated at not developing useful communication skills in Arabic despite their efforts in studying the language.

2.2.3. Worthwhile and realistic language objectives

Another specific aim contained both in *R (82) 18* and in the CEFR is "defining worthwhile and realistic objectives as explicitly as possible [in the learning and teaching context]"(CoE 2001: 3). To be exact, this aim is partially related to the one outlined in the previous section, but it also has some unique characteristics that are work considering here.

Defining what are to be considered "worthwhile objectives" turns out to be of paramount importance. In fact, the creation of unrealistic and unimportant objectives can greatly damage the process of language learning and teaching. The objectives of formal[1] and non-formal[2] language courses, however, are often different. For example, formal university courses in Arabic may concentrate on micro-languages (e.g. diplomacy, politics, economy, etc.), while non-formal classes usually prefer to take a more informal tone, e.g. studying the language of everyday life, tourism, and so forth. Nonetheless, despite the fact that language objectives can differ, no course benefits from unrealistic curricula planning nor from unimportant language objectives. It is therefore clear that unrealistic language objectives should be avoided both in non-formal and formal learning. A teacher's taskshould first be toidentify proper objectives that are consistent with the typology of their students and with the course type, and second to choose the most realistic and worthwhile objectives among those identified.

2.2.4. Suitable methods and materials

Last but not least, we come to the topic of teaching methods and materials, which is addressed in the general measures of *R (82) 18*, and in the first chapter of the CEFR. These are the fourth and fifth reasons given above, namely "developing appropriate methods and materials (...) [and] developing suitable forms and instruments for the evaluating of learning programmes" (CoE2001: 3).

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1. My translation: "the teaching of Classical Arabic is essential for those who study the Arab-Islamic tradition: Islamic scholars, jurists, etc.; while the teaching of Modern Standard Arabic is useful for those who are interested in referential communication. A mixed standard variety of national dialects, or a hybrid version of Arabic and New Arabic is what one should never teach, for they neither have defined corpus nor are well-defined systems; the language corpus should be selected within one national variety belonging either to a medium-high or to a medium-low language register, according to the chosen [learning] objective".

Formal education refers to education obtained via a classroom-based system, and is always provided by trained teachers. It can be defined also as a "purposive learning that takes place in a distinct and institutionalized environment specifically designed for teaching (...) and learning, which is staffed by learning facilitators who are specifically qualified for the sector, level and subject concerned and which usually serves a specified category of learners (EC 2009).

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2. Non-formal education is the type of learning that occurs outside the classroom in after-school programs, community-based organizations, museums or libraries.

This measure coincides again with the needs observed in classes teaching Arabic as a foreign language. The abovementioned aims should,in fact,encourage authors, professors, researchers and publishers to create different textbook typologies that reflect Arabic socio-linguistic realities and diversity. They should also encourage language professionals to provide suitable proficiency tests that will allow educators to evaluate students' progress. Even though additional practical research is needed in the field of Arabic language testing, recent years have witnessed an increase in scholars' interest in this topic,as well as the creation of improved official language tests (see e.g. de Graaf 1999; telc 2011; College voor Examens 2011a, 2011b; Amin, Sheb, Abd El Salam 2012; Runge 2012; Benchina and Rocchetti 2015).

Conclusion

The research cited in this chapter makes clear that the CEFR is a useful tool for both language professionals and teachers. The CEFR is characterized by a "universal slant"; it can be adapted to the specific needs of its users and it can be applied to many languages, including non-European ones such as Arabic. Its implementation can bring many advantages, on both practical and the oretical levels.

Among the practical improvements,one can find rethinking of curricula, definition of worthwhile and realistic objectives, creation of improved textbooks and language tests, etc.In the specific case of Arabic, use of the CEFR canfoster the creation of Arabic language course materials that reflect the socio-linguistic realities of the Arab world and allow different classes and types of learners to acquire communicative proficiencies appropriate to their specific needs (CoE 2001). Its flexible branching approach can help teachers focus on learners' specific training needs and monitor them, step by step, during the language acquisition process.With respect to theoretical improvements, the CEFR can also be quite useful. It can help to foster the study of European foreign-born residents' languages, including Arabic. As a consequence, it can indirectly provide pluralist knowledge of Arab culture, assist with overcoming prejudice and discrimination, and help to reign in xenophobia andultra-nationalist backlashes,while at the same time enrichinghost countries and their people(s).

The CEFR was translated into Arabic in 2008. This translation had a moderate diffusion in the Arab world, but today is gaining ground, especially in the Gulf region according to Norrbom (2014). Research on the CEFR'srelationship with Arabic has been started in recent years, and scholars have been discussing the topic in international forums; practical projects have also been carried out. However, the CEFR'sapplication to Arabic language education is still lacking, and largely based on individuals' efforts (*cf.* Soliman 2016). Many topics regarding this relationship need to be investigated further. For instance, the argument that educators should establish only the A and B levels (Basic and Independent User) as valid for Arabic language training needs to be scientifically validated. In addition, the CEFR is not suitable for Arabic literacy courses, in which absolute beginners, who are often not acquainted with the Arabic alphabet, learn to read and write in that language. The fact that neither levels nor descriptors for literacy are contemplated in the CEFR, together with the fact that Arabic literacy courses are generally the most diffused, should lead us to discuss scales or levels that are appropriate for those skills and competences that come before the A1 level.

In the end, we hope that this study will encourage scholars and language professionals to develop the debate on the CEFR in connection with Arabic from the point of view of both theory and practice, so that Arabic language and its culture can benefit from a useful tool such as the CEFR, which enables learners to study the language with efficiency, pursue the aims that are discussed in this chapter and go beyond them.

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L'arabe langue étrangère. Didactique et traduction. Approche pragmatique

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CECRL et lecture sémantique en arabe langue étrangère

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La question de la lecture active et sémantique n'a été que très rarement abordée dans les recherches relatives à la didactique de l'arabe. Pourtant, de nombreuses recherches fondées sur des perspectives pédagogiques et éducatives diversifiées ont vu le jour ces dernières années. Certaines s'inscrivent dans une approche cognitive décrivant la lecture dans son contexte tant psychologique que didactique. Ainsi, les travaux de Gérard Chauveau et Eliane Rogovas-Chauveau (1990), d'Alain Bentolila (2000), ou de Sylvie Cèbe et Roland Goigoux (2009) ont permis d'expliquer les procédés opératoires d'apprentissage de la lecture et de jeter les bases d'un enseignement adapté afin d'éviter aux apprenants ce que Gérard Chauveau appelle « l'insécurité linguistique ».

Notre insatisfaction provenait du fait que des élèves, candidats aux différents examens d'expression orale du baccalauréat, du BTS ou des oraux universitaires, sont incapables de faire une lecture sémantique de leurs textes.

Nous entendons par lecture sémantique, une activité signifiante et interprétative, une sorte de « ré-écriture mentale » des textes que