

ECHO

COLLANA DI TRADUTTOLOGIA
E DISCIPLINE DELLA MEDIAZIONE LINGUISTICA

II

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Senza la traduzione abiteremmo province confinanti con il silenzio
(George Steiner)

La collana “Echo” prende il nome dalla ninfa oreade, che personificava l’omonimo fenomeno fisico, rievocando così il contatto tra voci, culture e tradizioni diverse e al contempo la ricezione, la ripetizione e la variazione. Nasce col proposito di accogliere al suo interno una serie di monografie e di studi riferiti agli ambiti della traduzione e della mediazione linguistica in senso più ampio.

Caratterizzata da un approccio accademico, la collana si presenta come un funzionale veicolo per la diffusione dei risultati delle ricerche condotte nell’esteso dominio della Teoria e della prassi della traduzione e delle discipline della Mediazione linguistica.

Nella collana si intendono affiancare ai risultati della ricerca anche dei testi che possano rappresentare degli strumenti utili alla didattica della traduzione e dell’interpretariato.

Internazionale per vocazione, “Echo” si propone di ospitare al suo interno testi in lingua italiana, inglese e francese, con l’auspicio di apportare un importante contributo all’attuale indagine internazionale inerente alle discipline in questione.

A garanzia della rilevanza scientifica, della significatività del tema trattato e dell’originalità delle opere pubblicate, la collana adotta un sistema di doppio referaggio anonimo (*double blind peer reviewing*).

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MORE THAN JUST LABELS

RELATING TAFL TO CEFR LEVELS

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FOREWORD

JOSÉ NOIJONS^(*)

The Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) has become a powerful instrument for shaping language education in Europe and beyond. The task of aligning language policies, foreign language curricula, teacher education and training, textbook and course design and content, examinations and certification systems to the CEFR is currently being undertaken by a growing number of public and private stakeholders in all of the EU member states and in the member states of the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). The European Qualifications Framework, implemented in all member states of the European Union, lists language skills among the key competences of an educated citizen and calls for the outcomes of language education to be accurately linked to the reference scales of the CEFR.

Building on the success of the CEFR, the subsequently published CEFR Companion Volume makes the core

(*) Expert for the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML).

messages of the CEFR more accessible and user-friendly by enriching existing descriptor scales, adding scales for new areas, and providing guidance with a rationale for each scale. The CEFR Companion Volume supports users in applying the CEFR first and foremost to teaching and learning. It encourages the promotion of language as a tool for linguistic and cultural mediation, providing descriptors for plurilingual/pluricultural competences whose usage can inspire more integrated, richer and collaborative classroom tasks. It must be emphasized, though, that the Companion Volume does not replace the CEFR. Rather, it underlines key messages of the CEFR for teaching and learning and makes the CEFR more accessible and user-friendly by enriching existing descriptor scales, adding scales for new areas, and providing guidance with a rationale for each scale.

As the editors of this volume also point out, the CEFR is often rather narrowly perceived as a framework of language proficiency levels, rather than a conceptual framework of language use. In this context it is important to first ensure that language curricula, tests, examinations and assessment procedures take full account of the relevant aspects of language use and language competences as set out in the CEFR. The next step is then to make sure that the procedures to relate these curricula, tests and examinations to the common reference levels (Pre-A1 to C2) of the CEFR are carried out in a reliable and transparent manner so that the validity of these claims can be guaranteed. It must be understood that the implementation of curricula and the administration of the tests and examinations are conducted in accordance with internationally recognized principles of good practice and quality management.

Among many other activities in the field of promoting the CEFR, the ECML has aimed at supporting relevant stakeholders in the member states in their efforts to ensure quality and equity in the development of language curricula and in language testing and assessment and to provide valid language tests and examinations — in terms of their content and function. Some of the ECML activities focused on attempts to validate claims of links between curricula, tests and examinations and the CEFR. It supported stakeholders in their efforts to implement — where applicable — the European Qualifications Framework. As indicated in the CRELL report of the European Union (2015), good quality assessment and recognition of transversal linguistic competences are key tools to support employability, growth, and mobility.

One of the long term–benefits of the ECML activities is that foreign language curricula in member states are now being revised in light of their links to the CEFR. This is an ongoing process that will not only result in the implementation of new curricula but also in the creation of examination syllabi based on these new curricula. This is a process that may take some years to be fully implemented. One interesting phenomenon is that the curricula for each foreign language in a participating state also need to be aligned to each other. It would be difficult to accept that where the level requirements for each foreign language are the same, the curricula themselves widely differ.

Another long term–benefit of the ECML activities is that participating states ensure that learners are taught and assessed in valid and equitable ways and that learners’ test performances are expressed in terms of CEFR levels

that are valid, understood and accepted by the authorities in the member states.

Stakeholders such as policy makers, language test developers and teacher educators have shown an increasing interest in applying the CEFR to the development of tests of second language competence. Such tests may serve different purposes depending on the local context, such as entrance, placement, progress, (temporary) residence and naturalization. Also, candidates may range from young learners, adolescents, young adults to adults. Even if the CEFR was developed for foreign language learning, teaching and testing, many of its principles can also be applied to the development of tests of second language competence.

The European Centre for Modern Languages very much welcomes the initiatives of various recognized scholars in the field of Arabic language pedagogy to arrive at a theoretically valid and effective application of CEFR principles in the teaching of Arabic as a second or foreign language. The Centre believes that the publication of this volume will be an important step towards reaching the goals mentioned above and it will be happy to be of further assistance.

INTRODUCTION

ARABIC AS A LANGUAGE AMONG OTHER LANGUAGES?

MANUELA E.B. GIOLFO, FEDERICO SALVAGGIO

To relate or not to relate the teaching of Arabic to European standards, that is the question. In the last decades a heated debate has arisen in the domain of the Teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) about the suitability of Western proficiency frameworks, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), for Arabic teaching. While everybody seems to agree on the fact that the way in which Arabic has been traditionally taught (namely the *fushā*-based grammar–translation method) is not consistent with contemporary trends in language pedagogy, proposals to overcome this intrinsic incompatibility diverge. For some it is TAFL that should be rethought in order to adjust to CEFR standards, whereas for others it should be the other way around: CEFR principles should conform to the peculiarities that distinguish the Arabic language from other commonly taught languages.

One might wonder if in this latter case one can still speak of TAFL in its literal and technical sense, namely teaching Arabic “as a foreign language”, since such idiosyncrasies

of the Arabic language (or so supposed) seem to set it apart from any other foreign language. But if the linguistic nature of Arabic is so different to that of the other languages, should we then rather speak of teaching Arabic “as a unique language”? Should one consequently develop a framework specifically designed “only for Arabic”? What would be the advantage of setting standards tailor-made for a single language in the face of the ever-increasing need in our educational institutions and universities of «aligning language policies, foreign language curricula, teacher education and training, textbook and course design and content, examinations and certification systems» as mentioned in his foreword to this volume by Noijons? Should one instead move one step forward and propose an Arab framework, based on alternative principles, that will rival Western frameworks and could be applied also to other languages that claim the “same uniqueness” as Arabic?

We do hope this will not be too much of a disappointment for the reader, but the purpose of this volume is not to attempt to give definitive answers to all these essential questions. Rather, this collection of essays aims to raise awareness of the ideological and methodological implications that the choice to link (or not to link) TAFL to CEFR inevitably entails. In our intentions the book should hopefully stimulate a reflection on the epistemological premises underlying the adoption of one theoretical framework over another. Rooted in its own founding theoretical principles, any particular linguistic tradition will look at language, at its *raison d'être*, origin, and ultimate purpose, from the peculiar perspective of its vision of language. Consequently, the system of ideals and values that regulate the transmission of language knowledge within a

given cultural milieu will necessarily be related to its specific *Sprachanschauung*.

Regardless of whether one chooses to adopt a particular framework or not, this volume is intended as an invitation to theoretical and conceptual consistency. As suggested by its title, «More Than Just Labels», CEFR levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) should never been adopted just as “labels” to arbitrarily and superficially tag the progression of “levels” in a given Arabic course. The recourse to CEFR-based Arabic language teaching should always be made in perfect awareness of the ideological implications that this involves and consequently accompanied by a full readiness to develop Arabic teaching strategies that are coherent with the theoretical choice made.

In the first contribution, «CEFR-based TAFL. Syllabus, Lexicon, Variation», Manuela E.B. Giolfo (IULM University, IT), Giuliano Lancioni (Roma Tre University, IT) and Federico Salvaggio (University of Udine, IT) trace the history of Arabic teaching in Europe and analyse the impact on Arabic language pedagogy of recent approaches based on the concept of communicative competence, on the awareness of linguistic variation and on the use of corpus linguistics.

In the contribution «Knowledge of Arabic Variation as a CEFR-based Sociolinguistic Competence. Principles to inform Arabic L2 Teaching», Rasha Soliman (University of Leeds, UK) tackles the theme of the realism of linguistic variation in language use for Arabic L2 learners and links it to the idea of comprehensiveness and emphasis on diversity and plurilingualism expressed by CEFR.

In the contribution «Entering the House through the Proper Door. The Integrated Approach to Arabic Instruction», Munther Younes (Cornell University, USA) illustrates

his conception of an Integrated Approach to Arabic teaching based on the introduction, side by side, of standard and colloquial Arabic with complementary roles reflecting the sociolinguistic realities of the language.

In the contribution «CEFR for Arabic Based on a Diglossic Switching Model», Annamaria Ventura (University of Bologna, IT) analyses the discrepancies of CEFR in relation to Arabic diglossia and proposes an experimental diglossic switching model.

In the contribution «Standard–ology, Dialectology, and TAFL. From Ideology to Concrete Applications», Letizia Lombezzi (University of Bologna/University of Siena, IT) argues for the need to overcome the dichotomy “Standard–ology vs. Dialectology” in the teaching of Arabic and for the adoption of an integrated approach inspired by CEFR principles.

In the contribution «Pre–A1 Level in Light of the New CEFR Companion Volume and TAFL Theories», Andrea Facchin (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, IT) discusses the implementation of CEFR Pre–A1 level descriptors in Arabic teaching and in particular in the literacy acquisition process, considering theories in Arabic language pedagogy as formulated by scholars in the last few decades.

In the contribution «Advanced Levels of Proficiency and the Goals of Arabic Language in Higher Education», Kassem M. Wahba (The American University in Dubai, UAE) addresses several interrelated issues facing the current situation in teaching Arabic as a foreign language in higher education with a focus on the theoretical and historical basis of advanced proficiency levels.

In the last contribution, «Teaching Arabic in Context Language as a Means to Sample the Culture beyond the

Official Curriculum», Feras Alkabani (University of Sussex, UK) provides an example of integration of the Arabic curriculum at higher education level with extracurricular activities that help enhance students' grasp of the language by engaging with various cultural inputs in Arabic.

CEFR-BASED TAFL SYLLABUS, LEXICON, VARIATION

**MANUELA E.B. GIOLFO, GIULIANO LANCIONI,
FEDERICO SALVAGGIO^[*]**

1. Introduction

The teaching of Arabic in Europe moved its first steps in Italy, and in Rome in particular, with the institution of a first chair of Arabic at Sapienza University dating back to the mid-15th century at least. Such a location is by no means coincidental: the main motivation behind the introduction of the study of Arabic was to train missionaries and religious polemicists in order to enable them to understand the language of their near adversaries, including the religious ones. This original imprint was an important factor for the choice of the teaching method and the language variety to be taught.

The Arabic language is historically characterized by a linguistic system that is usually referred to as diglossia (cf. Ferguson, 1959). According to the current definition, this is

(*) Although the ideas expressed in this contribution are the result of discussion, collaboration and exchange of opinions between its authors, Manuela E.B. Giolfo is to be held responsible for sections 5 and 6, Giuliano Lancioni for sections 1 and 4, Federico Salvaggio for sections 2 and 3.

the coexistence of two main varieties of the same language which are used by the speakers according to the level of spontaneity of the communication, the subject dealt with, and the level of formality. Within a diglossic situation, the low variety is normally used in spoken and spoken written contexts (i.e. the case in which one reproduces in writing the characteristics of the spoken language) whereas the high variety is typically employed in written contexts and so-called written spoken (speech that is formal enough to be stylistically and linguistically close to reading a written text).

In the case of Arabic, the high variety is historically represented by Classical Arabic, a language codified from the Qur'an and archaic poetry (especially the pre- and proto-Islamic poetic tradition), and its contemporary version, usually referred to as Modern Standard Arabic. The high variety is a predominantly written, formal, cultured linguistic code, quite uniform from a diachronic and diatopic standpoint, which speakers only partially possess as a mother tongue as it is essentially acquired through schooling. It is a variety of Arabic that is not used by Arabic speakers for spontaneous conversation, and that is ill-suited to everyday, informal conversational contexts.

The low language, on the other hand, is represented by a multiplicity of spoken varieties, defined in Arabic as a "common, widespread, natural, basic" language and traditionally called Arabic dialects in the West. These are spoken, informal varieties, more or less differentiated from each other according to geographical distance and different linguistic substrata, which constitute the real languages spoken by Arabic speakers.

In the West, the initial prevalent interest in religious literature and other written texts, that were considered