

***Insights from the Common European Framework*, by Keith Morrow (Editor). Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004. 143 pages. ISBN: 0-19-430950-9**

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Insights from the Common European Framework is an illustration of and an insightful look into the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEF for short), one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken in the field of language education. The volume provides the necessary background to the CEF, explains its contents, explores some of its possible applications, and provides examples of the ways in which it has been used and applied. The main objective of the book is to bridge the gap between the theory as presented by the Framework and the practice when language teaching professionals attempt to understand the theory and apply it in their work.

The volume consists of a short preface, an introductory chapter and ten other chapters. The introductory chapter (chapter 1), written by the editor of the volume Keith Morrow, provides the necessary background to understanding the CEF and the other chapters in the volume. As put by the editor of the volume, the chapter “puts the CEF in its context as a product of developments in language teaching sponsored by the Council of Europe over a period of more than 40 years. It outlines some of the basic features of the CEF, and attempts to clarify the purposes for which it is intended to be used” (p. 3).

First of all, Morrow points out that the 250-page Reference Framework does not refer to a set of ideas that have a unique application in the continent of Europe only; that is, it is not the product of the European Union driven by nations that have a common political and economic framework. Rather, the CEF is essentially cultural in nature. It seeks to find ways and common backgrounds that promote language learning, teaching, and assessment. The underlying assumption behind this is that understanding the culture and recognizing the values of another country are only possible through language. Similarly, language learning/teaching is one of the ways in which inter-cultural awareness is developed. Hence, the CEF encourages multi-lingualism, multi-culturalism, and multi-pluralism because it recognizes the individual’s multi-competences and, in particular, the competence in another language.

Morrow goes on to demonstrate how the Framework specifies a wide range of options about the objectives, syllabus design, and classroom methodology. He makes it clear that the Framework does not prescribe the route you should take to achieve the objectives; rather it raises your awareness of the topology and gives you the details that enable you to plan your own route, or to look again if the route you normally take is still the best one. As such the main

value of the CEF is that “teachers, course designers, curriculum developers, and examination boards can engage with the CEF as a way of describing their current practice not in order to compare it in a neutral way with practice in other contexts, but in order to critique it in its own terms, and to improve it by drawing on ideas and resources set out in the Framework” (p. 8).

The other chapters in the volume examine and critique specific aspects of the Framework including its strengths and weaknesses, and look at ways in which it has been applied and used in some European countries. In chapter 2, Heyworth demonstrates how the CEF provides a comprehensive account about language education which language teachers, teacher trainers, and academic managers should consult because it provides resources that have practical applications in the planning and delivery of language courses. In chapter 3, Lenz illustrates how the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and the Common European Framework (CEF) influence one another in a number of ways since both share the common reference levels of language proficiency as their main core element. Mariani, chapter 4, illustrates how the CEF recognizes the facts that learning a language is the ability to change, adapt, and update one’s needs to suit the contexts in which knowledge needs to be used. By the same token, it is argued that learning is an ability that continues throughout one’s lifespan.

In chapter 5, Keddle discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the CEF when applied to the secondary school syllabus. She argues that the most important strength of the CEF is its renewed focus on the situational, functional, and communicative aspects of language teaching and learning, whereas its main weakness is that it does not measure grammar-based progression and development. Chapter 6, Komorowska, examines the reception of the CEF by teachers and teacher trainers in Poland. The chapter identifies the difficulties the framework faces, and outlines the possibilities of working with it in pre- and in-service education in that country.

Huhta and Figueras, chapter 7, discuss how the CEF can be used to promote language learning through the diagnostic language assessment system available in 14 European languages, and how this system can be used to support language learning and teaching in Europe. In chapter 8, North demonstrates how the CEF can be related to assessments, examinations and language courses in practical and accessible ways.

The last three chapters of the book are case studies that report on the successful application of the CEF in the different European countries. Case study 1, Little and Simpson, reports on a study that used the CEF to develop an ESL curriculum for newcomer pupils in Irish primary schools. Case study 2, Manasseh, reports on a study that used the CEF to develop English courses for teenagers at the British Council in Milan, Italy. And case study 3, Wall, reports on a study that used the CEF to develop English courses for adults at the University of Gloucestershire in the UK.

Does the book achieve its objectives? The answer is invariably, yes. Indeed, the book has provided insightful look into the Common European Framework for Language Learning, Teaching, and Assessment; and by gaining

insights into the Framework, we can gain powerful insight into our own work in the field of language teaching and learning. The book is written in an easy-to-follow and accessibly style, with lots of headings, sub-headings, summaries and illustrative charts. The book will be of interest to all those concerned with second/foreign language teaching and learning including policy makers, language planners, syllabus designers, researchers, and language teachers.

Finally, it is hoped that the Common European Framework for Language Learning, Teaching, and Assessment, as illustrated in this volume, constitutes an incentive for a similar initiative or framework in the Arab World the objective of which is the learning and teaching of foreign languages at Arab universities, institutions and schools, as well as the teaching of Arabic as a second or foreign language.

***The Jordanian Novel 1980 – 1990: A Study and an Assessment* by Fahd A. A. Salameh, Ministry of Culture, Amman, 2000.**

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This book, published by the Jordanian Ministry of Culture in 2000, is Salameh's doctoral dissertation presented to the University of London in 1998. Among another reasons, the author's choice of this era is sufficiently convincing for being motivated by examination. No wonder, the term 'artistic' is extremely much less artistic works of the preceding periods. In Salameh's opinion, four Jordanian novelists merit such qualifications during the specified decade; these are: Ghalib Halasa, Mu'nis al-Razzaz, Ilyas Farkouh, and Ziyad Qasim, to each of whom he devoted a single chapter.

Chapter One is introductory; it furnishes the reader with background knowledge about the rise of the novel in Jordan starting from early attempts (1922 - 1948), moving through a period of transition (1948 - 1967), a period which witnessed three important works, viz. Tayseer Sboul's "You Are Since Today", Ameen Shinnar's "The Nightmare", and Saalim al-Nahas's "Memories of a Barren". These three major figures are believed to have had an impact on the development of the novel in Jordan. Moreover, the three novelists "received massive critical attention in both Jordan and the Arab world, because their works provide a vision that is based on ideology" (P. 32).

Halasa's novels are the subject-matter of Chapter Two, in which Salameh describes him as estranged and frustrated dreamer. Out of his seven novels and two collections of short stories, Salameh has selected three outstanding novels for discussion, viz. "Laughter", "The Khamsin", i.e., 50 days falling between "the cold, wet winter and the hot, dry summer" (P. 57), and "Lamenting the Ruins". References to the other four novels are utilized as supportive and supplementary arguments.