

Introduction

Evelina D Galaczi and Cyril J Weir

The term ‘framework’ and related synonyms such as ‘guidelines’ and ‘standards’ have acquired frequent usage in language testing debates in the last decade. We now often refer to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale, the ACTFL Guidelines, to name but a few tools used in the description of language proficiency. We also talk about frameworks for test validation, for test fairness, for teaching, for accreditation, etc. With the increased influence of frameworks in the second/foreign language context it is important to take some time to consider their role in more detail. Thus the aim of this volume is to explore the role of language frameworks on assessment, learning and teaching. It does so through a collection of 21 edited papers based on presentations given at the 4th International Conference of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) held in Kraków in July 2011. The 4th ALTE Conference came at a time when the role of language assessment in social and educational contexts is growing, its importance in national and local policies is increasing, and its role in helping to regulate international mobility and access to higher education and employment is expanding. The conference provided a valuable shared forum and a welcome opportunity to expand the discussion and debate about the role of language frameworks in a number of contexts. With its focus on the influence of frameworks in a range of contexts, this volume also continues the themes discussed in *Language Testing Matters* (volume 31 in the *Studies in Language Testing* series, edited by Taylor and Weir).

The selected papers represent a small subset of the many excellent presentations made at the ALTE conference. They have been chosen as representative of three core strands addressed during the conference. The papers have been grouped thematically, but it must be noted that the groupings are not mutually exclusive; indeed, we often saw in our editorial discussions that a number of alternative categories would also have been possible.

Section One deals with frameworks in *social contexts* and focuses on their role in migration and multilingual policy and practice. The two papers by Van Avermaet and Rocca and by Grego Bolli offer us useful insights into migration policy in a number of European countries and provide a valuable summary of the Language Assessment for Migration and Integration (LAMI) Forum organised by ALTE members and held at the ALTE 2011

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conference under the auspices of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland. **Piet Van Avermaet** and **Lorenzo Rocca's** paper continues the discussions that ALTE has been engaged in for a number of years now, notably at previous forums in Berlin (2005 and 2009), Cambridge (2008), Rome (2010) and Munich (2011), which have considered the growing prominence and controversial role of language testing in European migration policy. The authors discuss the increase of migration in recent years, which has led to more and more countries placing a greater emphasis on using language tests for integration and citizenship purposes or as a requirement for obtaining a visa to first enter a country. They survey these recent developments from an ethical and political angle and argue that if language tests become a key discriminator in determining entry, it is crucial that any test used is fair and fit for purpose so that particular groups are not unfairly denied access at any stage in their journey as migrants. The LAMI forum was an opportunity to discuss some of the key questions involved both conceptually and through case studies in a number of countries: the United Kingdom, Belgium and Italy, and to explore how a framework could help in understanding the issues involved in language testing and access. **Giuliana Grego Bolli** builds upon Van Avermaet and Rocca's paper by discussing in more detail the latest migration policies in Italy and situating her discussion within the context of current and historical political, economic, social, cultural and educational issues. The author stresses that to deal with all of these issues effectively, we need a multidimensional approach which is supported by interdisciplinary expertise and coordinated actions, and argues that social sciences should play a fundamental role in proposing approaches and models functional to the management of migration processes. European institutions should consider the importance of introducing shared frameworks in the context of language and migration, as such frameworks could provide concrete and consistent guidelines to help institutions to deal with the different dimensions involved in a coherent and coordinated way.

The next set of papers in Section One shifts the focus to multilingual policies and projects initiated by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. In his opening paper **Waldemar Martyniuk** provides a detailed overview of the latest initiatives of the Council of Europe in support of an inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural approach to language education. The author reviews relevant policy documents and presents a range of tools already available or currently under development by the Language Policy Division and the European Centre for Modern Languages. He also discusses the rationale behind the next, fourth medium-term programme of the activities of the European Centre for Modern Languages (scheduled for 2012–15) which aims at facilitating European co-operation on the implementation of the new concept of language education. The next two papers deal with practical aspects of surveying multilingualism in different national contexts. **Pawel**

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Poszytek's paper shows how a pan-European project – the Language Rich Europe project – is creating a framework for the investigation of the adherence of national multilingual policy and practice to European recommendations and resolutions. The paper focuses on the research tool used – the European Index of Multilingual Policies and Practices – and presents the background of this innovative research project which spans a broad spectrum of national policies and practices in formal education, and also in the business sector, the media and the public sphere. The paper also discusses the construct underlying the research tool and explores challenging issues regarding validity of the research. In the last paper in this section, **Michaela Perlmann-Balme** focuses on the European Survey on Language Competences, which is a major initiative by the European Commission to support the development of language learning policies across Europe. The purpose of the survey is to provide participating countries with comparable data on foreign language competence and knowledge about good practice in language learning. The author describes one of the fundamental stages of the project, which involved the development of language test tasks at four CEFR levels (A1 to B2), with the aim to create items that were as similar to each other and at the same time as true to their respective cultural and linguistic origin as possible. She further provides a useful discussion of the considerations which need to be taken into account when creating test tasks and items of identical difficulty across a range of languages without applying a method of mere translation.

Section Two of the volume addresses the use of frameworks in *educational contexts*. In his opening paper **Neil Jones** provides a clear and thought-provoking overview of issues to be considered when conceptualising an inclusive framework for languages. The author takes us through key considerations in language learning (as first, second or foreign languages) which result in different profiles of language ability, but can be described through differing configurations of the same parameters: informal learning, formal language knowledge, social and academic contexts of use, and cognitive models. He argues that we need an inclusive theoretical framework to encompass all three kinds. The CEFR is an instance of a more general framework for foreign language learning, teaching and assessment. Jones argues that by adding parameters and illustrations it can be extended without challenging its validity for that original purpose. Doing so should enable language assessment to address many linguistically complex educational contexts, and contribute to improving educational outcomes for language learners of all kinds.

In the next paper **Brian North** and **Elzbieta Jarosz** focus on the implementation of the CEFR in teacher-based assessment and outline a scheme for CEFR Certification recently introduced in EAQUALS (Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services). The authors describe and discuss the 'EAQUALS Certificate of CEFR Achievement' scheme, which further develops procedures from the Council of Europe's *Manual*

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for relating examinations to the CEFR (2009), adapting them to the school context. They focus on specific elements of this accreditation and discuss the different stages of accreditation involved. In addition to explaining the rationale and procedures of the scheme, the authors also discuss some of the main problems inherent in school-based assessment of CEFR levels and the way in which the scheme is designed to address these issues.

The next paper shifts the focus beyond Europe to Japan and the CEFR-J – an adaptation of the original CEFR to language teaching, learning and assessment in Japanese contexts. **Masashi Negishi**, **Tomoko Takada** and **Yukio Tono** provide us with a progress report on the development of the CEFR-J. They discuss the CEFR's framework compatibility with English language teaching in Japan, and argue for the need for modifications in Japanese contexts. The authors present an interim report of the project and its stages: the compilation of the preliminary versions of the CEFR-J, the validation phase, and the pilot phase for using the revised CEFR-J at school. Their paper focuses predominantly on the first two stages of the project and also describes accompanying resources for implementing the CEFR-J into educational contexts in Japan, such as the CEFR-J wordlist and the Can Do descriptor database. The authors also provide a useful discussion of the potential impact of the CEFR-J on Japan's foreign language education policy.

In the next paper in this section, **Ursula Hehl** and **Nicole Kruczek** present an analysis of the impact of the CEFR on university language teaching practice, based on a comparison of two German university language centres and their application of the CEFR in course organisation, teaching and assessment. The authors outline general principles which need to be considered regarding course organisation and policies concerning placement and admittance to courses and the problems they pose, and address relevant questions such as how much course time students should be granted to take learners from one level to the next, and aspects of learner autonomy. The authors' discussion also focuses on teachers' knowledge about and implementation of the CEFR into their course practice and they argue that much remains to be done in terms of teacher training in order to ensure a more consistent understanding and application of the CEFR. The theme of developing assessment literacy and a more in-depth understanding of using frameworks is picked up in the final two papers in this section. In the first one, **Enrica Piccardo** focuses on the use of the CEFR by practitioners and argues that they often have only a partial knowledge of it and have difficulty integrating the CEFR into everyday practice. This is partially due, the author argues, to the lack of comprehensive training with regard to the principles and specifics of the CEFR. The paper overviews a four-year European project which aims to investigate the impact of the CEFR on the culture of evaluation in different contexts. The author discusses the data collected during the piloting phase

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of the project and explains how the project builds on these results in order to produce a tool to support teacher educators in building a more complex vision of language teaching, learning and assessment. Extending the concept of assessment literacy in the final paper in this section, **Marilyn Kies** discusses the potential which frameworks such as the CEFR hold for facilitating communication, as they allow teachers, students, publishers, policy makers and examination boards to refer to common proficiency levels using a standard terminology. Kies discusses how institutional and professional test users may use frameworks as guidelines to decide which certification exams meet their requirements and focuses on three examples of frameworks: Weir's (2005) socio-cognitive validity framework which allows stakeholders to decide which exams are likely to provide trustworthy assessments, the Council of Europe's 2009 publication of their *Manual* relating language examinations to the CEFR, which allows users to judge the extent to which claims of linkage to the CEFR are substantiated, and the CEFR itself (Council of Europe 2001) or similar alternative proficiency frameworks which allow users to decide which exams assess the skills they require and which level of certification they should require.

Section Three of the volume focuses on the *practical issues* associated with the application of frameworks in test and scale development and validation. The section starts with a focus on rating scales and in the opening paper **David Horner** addresses the assessment of pronunciation, which, the author argues, has been inadequately dealt with by the CEFR. Horner examines the CEFR phonological control scale (2001:116) from the angle of intelligibility, accent and strain on the listener and proposes an alternative pronunciation scale which builds on the existing CEFR pronunciation scale, while addressing some of its shortcomings. He does so by developing a useful and comprehensive discussion of conceptual issues involved with the definition and assessment of pronunciation. In the next paper **Katrin Wisniewski** focuses on scales for assessing fluency and presents a detailed analysis of the CEFR A2 level fluency descriptors with the aim of finding empirical evidence for the usefulness and adequacy of the current descriptors. The author argues that the appearance of some aspects of the CEFR A2 fluency level description seems dependent on the task type and the target language, and also questions the construct underlying the CEFR fluency performance descriptors since there are concepts in the scale which relate not to fluency but to other aspects of second language competence. She presents valuable empirical evidence of key fluency variables which were found to play a role at this proficiency level in her research study and which could be used to guide the assessment of fluency. The next paper, by **Bart Deygers, Koen Van Gorp, Lucia Luyten** and **Sien Joos** addresses issues involved with rating scale design through a comparative study of two analytic rating scales. The authors focus their discussion on the Certificate of Dutch as a Foreign Language (Certificaat Nederlands

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als Vreemde Taal, CNaVT) and describe the development of a new polytomous rating scale which incorporates both CEFR guidance and content expert judgements. In the paper the authors provide a useful comparison of a dichotomous and a polytomous scale based on qualitative and quantitative data and provide interesting insights about the statistical robustness, authenticity and validity of the two scales. In the next paper, we move to the conceptual issue of the ‘native speaker’ as a criterion used in some frameworks and associated rating scales. **Rachel L Brooks** and **Beth Mackey** address the issue of the ‘well educated native speaker’ in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions. The ‘native speaker’ concept, which has been called into question by second language acquisition and language testing practitioners, is an important consideration for scale developers and users. Following a discussion of the definition of a native speaker, the authors contextualise the issues surrounding the role and characteristics of the ‘well-educated native speaker’ within the ILR Skill Level Descriptions and discuss how the ILR scale, which is functional in nature, is used by the US Government to test native and non-native speakers of a language.

The next set of papers in this section provide useful insights into the role of frameworks in test development and validation. The first two papers address the use of translation and mediation tasks, a relatively under-researched area in language testing. **Ágnes Dévényi** addresses the issue of whether foreign language mediation is an independent language skill and whether it can be considered a legitimate language examination subtest. She focuses on language examinations in Hungary, which often include a mediation task, and argues that foreign language mediation is an independent language skill which can be measured by specific criteria and which contributes to a more complex assessment of the test takers’ language proficiency. In the next paper **Maria Brau** looks at the assessment of translation ability used by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation. The author focuses on the ILR Translation Performance Skills Levels Descriptions which define the required tasks by characterising the source texts that an individual is required to deal successfully with at a given level. Based on these characterisations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has developed testing instruments to assess translation performance. This paper discusses the development of the translation test and reviews the ensuing test validation investigations. The next paper, by **Marianne Nikolov** and **Gábor Szabó**, moves back to Hungary and to young language learners/test takers. The authors argue that it is necessary to shift from testing *of* learning to testing *for* learning, a key issue in the young learner classroom. Their paper presents the first results of a large-scale study involving learners aged 6–13 in Hungary, which aimed to develop, pilot, and validate new diagnostic tests for young learners in the four basic skills and to place the tests on a scale of difficulty corresponding to the A1 and A2 levels of the CEFR. The authors

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describe the data collection procedures and discuss the evidence which was gathered about the performance of the tests.

The final three papers are joined by the common theme of the role of statistical procedures in quality assurance. **Thomas Eckes**'s paper focuses on the investigation of differential item functioning (DIF), which plays a key role in frameworks on test fairness and test validity. In the paper the author describes an investigation in the context of the Reading and Listening sections of the Test of German as a Foreign Language (*Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, TestDaF) and through four different procedures for DIF analysis. He provides a useful discussion of the results in terms of theoretical and methodological issues. In the next paper **Gudrun Klein** focuses on the role of background variables and investigates their role in a language test for immigration in Germany, the Deutsch-Test für Zuwanderer (DTZ), which assesses immigrants' German language skills at CEFR Levels A2 and B1. The paper ends with an argument that in the spirit of test fairness, offering specific groups of individuals intensified support in exam preparation may be advisable. The final paper in this section, by **Vahid Aryadoust** and **Christine C M Goh** explores the relative merits of two scaling models (cognitive diagnostic models and confirmatory factor analysis), which have been developed originally for psychological studies and have now been adapted into language assessment. Their paper presents a discussion of the relative merits of the two scaling models, as applied to the listening test of the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB) and provides recommendations for their use in modelling second language (L2) listening.

We hope that the insights provided in this volume regarding the influence of language frameworks in a variety of social and educational contexts will be a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand the policies, procedures and challenges encountered in the application of language frameworks and the interplay of theoretical insights and practical considerations.

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