Original Paper

Towards a European Plurilingual Habitus? A Critical Analysis of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and its Symbolic Power

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Abstract

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), introduced by the Council of Europe (CoE) in 2001, is intended to function as an instrument for developing educational policy and practice. However, in reality, there is a mismatch between the Council's mission to promote plurilingualism and the project's underlying neoliberal logic to impose its monolingual perspectives in reference to language learning, teaching, and assessment. Despite containing a much valuable taxonomy for describing language proficiency, the CEFR has been globally used as a standardisation tool that aims to measure the language competence of immigrants, asylum seekers, and test-takers. In doing so, the Framework acts as a gatekeeping mechanism of inclusion or exclusion. Considering CEFR's contradictory nature, the article seeks to explore its complexity and uncover its problematic character. Viewing the CEFR as an instrument of power, the author utilises Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital to examine who the policy disadvantages and whose ideological agenda it serves.

Keywords

language policy, English, CEFR, plurilingualism, language education, diversity, multilingualism

1. Introduction

The European language policy notion of plurilingualism can be understood through its documents as an important element in promoting a democratic European citizenry that recognises the diversity of speakers' existing linguistic capital (Beacco & Byram, 2007). One such document, The Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe

(CoE) in 2001 reflects the will of the European Union (EU) to address this issue and is the focus of this article. Intended as a framework, not a manual, CEFR is a powerful document that has imposed its parameters of language competences all over the world and defined standards for language teaching and learning. Furthermore, as will be argued in the analysis, the CEFR is a contradictory policy document. Its major contradiction is in the contrast between the plurilingual approach it advocates as a response to the increasing dominance of English in Europe and the monolingualism toward which its descriptors point. It is somewhat unsurprising that, in line with the European ethos to promote efficient communication among its nation states, English, the language of the Anglophone countries, would best serve that purpose.

Following Shohamy's (2006), stance on language as a "potent symbol of power" that is "embedded in political, ideological, social, and economic agendas" (p. 55), it is my intention to explore the complexity of CEFR's initiation and formulation. The analysis will be done through the prism of neoliberalism, which places the knowledge of a language of a dominant nation as an essential life skill that will improve a nation's position in the competing world economy. Bourdieu's linguistic capital, as one of the forms of cultural capital, in particular, will also prove insightful in understanding the role of the language of a dominant nation in creating inequalities among different social groups. In essence, in line with Dryzek (2010), who defines critical policy analysis as "enlightenment of those suffering at the hands of power" (p. 191), I question the nature of CEFR by examining who the policy disadvantages and whose ideological agenda it serves.

2. Policy Analysis Model

Resembling Trowler (2003) who accentuates the complexity of interpreting policy, Phillipson (2003) also views the analysis of language policy as "messy", thus recognising its multi-faceted and shifting nature. In this sense, a policy is not just a set of principles and actions, but "... a process, something which is dynamic rather than static" (Trowler, 2003, p. 96). Further to this, Ball's (1994) definition of the policy best summarises its problematic character. According to him,

> Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the "wild profusion" of local practice. (Ball, 1994, p. 10)

With regard to language policy, due to insufficient attention paid to its implementation in practice (indeed, research in this area has been anecdotal so far), it is frequently seen as "mostly manifestations of intentions" (Shohamy, 2006, p. 45).

The Basic Layered Model (Doherty, 2011), which combines elements of Considine's (1994) and Bowe et al.'s (1992) analytical frameworks, will be used in my analysis. It best captures the complexity of the policy field in its initiation and formulation stages and their interconnected and co-influence. Following Page (as cited in Moran et al., 2010), who maintains that "policies come into being through being on an agenda" (p. 208), the initiation stage deals with the context of influence through a process of contestation

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around meaning. The context of policy formulation is recognised as the "translation of policy objectives into instructions for action" (Hill, 2014, p. 204). It is an arena of struggle which includes an examination of the roles of those who do such work (Bowe et al., 1992). In other words, speaking in Hill's (2014) terms, policy initiation/formulation partnership can be described as "where to go and how to get there" (p. 161).

3. The Role of Languages and Language Policy in Europe

In the past 30 years, European language policy has been under the influence of a number of factors, specifically the expansion of the EU with its increasing diversity and the movement of people across and into the EU, which generated the need for policies that would appropriately respond to the challenges of globalisation, mobility, employment, and economic growth. In these circumstances, the role of language would play a significant role in nation-building. The issue of language was approached in order to avoid ambiguity and the creeping dominance of one language over another.

Language policy at the European level is shaped by two organisations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. The official language policy, which remains a responsibility of individual member-states, as stated in the European Parliament Facts Sheet of the European Union, is the following:

> Languages are an integral part of the European identity and the most direct expression of culture. Languages not only play a key role in the everyday life of the European Union, but are also fundamental for respecting cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU. (Franke, 2017)

To put it briefly, language policy in Europe focuses on three main areas: support of the minority languages, promotion of individual plurilingualism (mother tongue plus two), and multilingualism.

Multilingualism, trumpeted through the EU mantra 'Unity in diversity', is intended as a foundation for achieving intercultural understanding. The principle ensures by giving equal status to each language in each Member State a better prestige and an appeal of it as a foreign language that could be studied. The EU Commission document "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006", aimed at limiting the excessive emphasis on English in European education systems, reflects an ongoing concern about this issue:

> learning one lingua franca alone is not enough… English alone is not enough… In non-anglophone countries recent trends to provide teaching in English may have unforeseen consequences on the vitality of the national language. (Commission of the European Communities, 2003, pp. 4-8)

On the other hand, the EU's increasing priority for economic growth from a neo-liberal perspective places a good command of foreign languages as "a key competence essential to make one's way in the modern world and labour market" (CoE, 2011). Such a shift signals the move toward the common language, which only prioritises big hegemonic languages, such as English, French, and German. The need to enhance intercultural dialogue within Europe in the context of global competition assigned English as a "lingua economica" (Phillipson, 2003, p. 149) an instrumental role in achieving market-oriented purposes.

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Seen in this fashion, multilingualism, as Kraus and Kazlauskait-Gürbüz (2014) assert, is considered "a challenge for creating an integrated market-cum-polity" (p. 517).

4. The CEFR and the Notion of Plurilingualism

The CEFR is a part of the process in which institutional Europe has grown from 10 founding members of the Council of Europe to the 47 member countries today. Published in 2001, the European Year of Languages, this document is intended to serve as a "comprehensive, transparent, and coherent" reference instrument that establishes canons for foreign language teaching and learning, language syllabi, curriculum, textbooks, and testing (CoE, 2001, p. 2) across Europe and beyond. Committed to advocating plurilingualism, it is an important document that frames language policy in Europe.

The term *plurilingualism* coined by CEFR is defined by the Macmillan dictionary online as "the ability to use skills in a number of different languages for effective communication". Ironically, a coherent definition of plurilingualism is not readily understandable or 'user-friendly' as the CEFR authors claim, at least not to an uninformed reader. Drawing attention to the difference between multilingualism, which is "the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society" and plurilingualism, the authors explain:

> the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. (CEFR, 2001, p. 4)

As follows from the above, the term allows for multiple interpretations. What is clear is that plurilingualism is perceived as rooted in a person's mother tongue (Little, 2007, p. 651). The interdependence between the individual and the social dimension is also apparent; the learner as a 'social agent' activates his linguistic and non-linguistic potential to engage successfully in various contextual aspects. In reality, CEFR descriptors have relevance to second- and foreign-language learning and are based on a monolingual view which favours only standard language in use. Little (2006) notes that although the notion of plurilingualism is central to the Council of Europe, "neither the CEFR nor the ELP [English Language Portfolio] does full justice to the concept" (p. 187).

Plurilingualism promoted by the Council of Europe has been subject to some stringent criticism by many authors (Fulcher, 2004; Krumm, 2007; Shohamy, 2001, 2006, 2007). They comment on the broad implementation of CEFR in the high-stakes examination of the level of language proficiency of immigrants, asylum seekers, and other test-takers. Used as a barrier to integration, the CEFR in Krumm's terms (2007, p. 668) "neglects their [migrants] plurilingualism" contrary to the Council of Europe's

promise to support it. A commonly held view among many scholars is that the document serves "the Council of Europe's political, cultural and education agenda" (Little, 2006).

A close look at how the policy came to existence might help uncover these hidden agendas.

5. Policy Initiation. The Context of Influence

A variety of historical, political, and social developments were instrumental in initiating language policy. The aftermath of World War II left the European economy in ruins. The only way to prevent another warfare was to unite. The mutual interest in coal and steel bound six countries (with the former enemies France and Germany among them) to create a common market in the 1950s. Furthermore, the difficult period of reconstruction revealed the advantages of creating a stronger entity that would ensure better immunity for Europe within the global economic terrain. With the accession of new member states, the Union became more culturally and linguistically diverse. As a result, language was gaining increasing prominence in intercultural dialogue.

Developments in linguistics and sociolinguistics in the 1960s-1980s also influenced the reinforcement of the status of language in the nation-state in legitimising it as a significant identifier of collective groups. By including categories like 'correct' vs 'incorrect', grammatical' vs. 'non-grammatical', 'standard' vs. 'non-standard' with the most extreme categorisation of 'native' vs. 'non-native', linguists contributed to developing the view of language as a closed, limited system with fixed boundaries (similar to the view of the nation-state as a closed and finite society). Such paradigms, which were further enforced by standardisation, formalised certain language forms as acceptable and unacceptable. Since linguists were the ones who possessed knowledge about the language, they began prescribing how it should be used. The CEFR, written by linguists, is an obvious reflection and prescription of such normative views of the language.

The 1970s and early 1980s were characterised by neoliberalism as a dominant economic doctrine that advocates minimal government, while at the same time insisting that strong states are necessary "for the operation of ostensibly free markets and to deal with the consequences of 'market failure'" (Price, 2014, p. 569). The spread of neoliberalism was further accompanied by globalisation and technological revolution. Globalisation redefined the dominant role of the State in "settling education agendas" (Robertson, 2012), thus giving reign to other stakeholders. Language education policy among them has not been immune to global forces. It has responded to hegemonic neoliberal orientation by stressing the importance of the language of the dominant nation-states which set the trends in language teaching, learning, and assessment for years ahead. Languages were viewed as "commodities for general sale in the market" (Bori, 2001, p. 39), and the ability to communicate in a language was (and still is) an essential job skill. In a world which is increasingly dominated by Coca-Cola, CNN, Microsoft and other transnational corporations, the question of which language is seen as a promoter of a global culture leaves no doubt. English, as the *lingua franca*, the language of communication, became dominant in all spheres of life.

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Such supranational bodies as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) played a highly active role in strengthening the corporate power and position of English across all continents. As the language of globalisation, it was firmly anchored in the neoliberal *laissez-faire* market forces and served as a vehicle to make people economically competitive. Acknowledging English as the language of globalisation, Pennycook (as cited in Ricento, 2000) contends that "it is the language in which the fate of most of the world's citizens is decided, directly or indirectly" (p. 114). At the same time, the field of language education following similar neoliberal contours witnessed an ascendancy of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasises communication in real-life situations. Actively promulgated by the Council of Europe, it quickly became a global method associated with instrumental and economic goals of neoliberalism to make learners compliant with the market needs (Block, 2008).

With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the EU continued its move toward the political and social integration of its Member States. The growing role of immigration and the labour movement also contributed to the complexity of the European linguistic mosaic and further strengthened Europe's commitment to promoting and protecting multilingualism. The emergence of the nation-state necessitated the questions of the eligibility and belonging of different groups who shared the same territory (Shohamy, 2006, p. 25). One way to guard the disappearing frontiers of the EU against unwanted groups was to introduce language tests as a gatekeeping mechanism for inclusion or exclusion.

Thus, language as a key element in the establishment of the nation-state, previously viewed simply as a purely free communicative means of interaction, "began to be symbolised with power, ideology, nationalism, loyalty, patriotism and the drive for assimilation" (May, 2001, as cited in Shohamy, 2006, p. 26).

6. Bourdieu's Theory of Linguistic Capital

Inequities that are perpetuated through the English language hegemony and the use of standardised forms of language assessment can be better addressed through a Bourdieusian concept of capital and field. Echoing other critics, Bourdieu (1998) saw neoliberalism as a political programme, a unification of the economic field to the global scale. In the spirit of knowledge-based economies, his idea of economic capital is also firmly attached to material wealth. However, to broaden a narrow understanding of capital from a purely material sense, Bourdieu (1991) proposes two more types of capital, namely, cultural and social capitals, which, welded together with economic, hold the ultimate symbolic capital.

According to him, cultural capital can be *embodied* (linguistic practices, knowledge, and skills embodied by an individual), *objectified* (cultural goods, texts, and material objects), or *institutional* (academic qualifications, awards, and credentials). He asserts that cultural capital is directly linked to material wealth. The author sees language as an element of cultural capital that can be traded within the labour market. In essence, it can serve as a long-term individual or social investment with high economic value.

The value of English, as a supranational language, has been enhanced through multiple mechanisms and has resulted in making it the preferred linguistic capital in the context of global language markets.

The concepts of *field* and *habitus* are also crucial in understanding Bourdieu's (1990) approach to 'capital'. *Habitus* can be understood as "a set of dispositions that leads agents to act and react in certain ways" (Thompson, 1991, p. 12). *Fields* are places where individuals live and engage in social activities through which types of capital are distributed. Thus, the linguistic market needs to be understood as a *field* in which agents practice their habitus and through which they are able to gain social and economic capital. People's positions in the field depend on the amount of capital they hold (Bourdieu, 1977). In other words, limited possession of the linguistic capital (proficiency in the official language) or lack thereof may restrict access to a host of opportunities taken for granted by those who profit from the "right kind" of capital (Blackledge, 2001). From this perspective, a state's official language can be considered a linguistic capital that affords its owners symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 50-52). In contrast, local language varieties are of value only within their communities.

7. Institutional and Non-institutional European Language Policy

Further insight into the language used in the EU's institutions will exemplify my point. The right of the citizens of the European Union to communicate in one of the official languages is explicitly stated in The Treaty of Amsterdam states that in article 8d of the EC Treaty:

> Every citizen of the Union may write to any of the institutions or bodies referred to in this article or in Article 4 in one of the languages mentioned in Article 248 and have an answer in the same language. (EC Treaty, 1997)

However, many aspects remain implicit and deeply embedded in the traditions and values of each country. In the present-day EU, however, the reality appears slightly complicated. The declared formal equality of the 24 official languages, institutional multilingualism, does not always seem to be respected. In reality, some languages enjoy greater currency than others. At the institutional level, the use of languages in bodies such as the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Court of Justice is limited to a handful of languages of its founding members, English, French, and German. The Council of Europe, with an advisory and advocacy role to its 47 Member States, communicates only in two languages, English and French. For historical reasons, the states whose languages are more important than others possess more symbolic power. The hierarchy among them, or in Phillipson's (2003) language the "pecking order of states and languages" (p. 11), points to the shift from French to English as the primary working language in EU institutions, which is particularly visible since the accession of Britain into the Union in 1973 and the ascendancy of globalisation.

At a non-institutional level (outside the EU between the Member States and their citizens), language policies are not subject to EU legislation. They remain the responsibility of national governments according to the principle of subsidiarity. With English, holding a hegemonic position by dominant countries, there was no need to promote it in the EU member states. Most non-English speaking nations

do not have a choice when it comes to deciding which language to learn. Indeed, such a decision could potentially result in a "commercial withdrawal from continental Europe" (Fulcher, 2004). On the other hand, the adoption of English as their first or additional foreign language entails obvious benefits for developing countries, which, as Lillis and Curry (2013) note, plays a role in determining who participates and benefits from the global knowledge economy (as cited in Erling & Seargeant, 2013, p. 3). Thus, the values associated with English become integrated into the local setting and imbued into a social, family, and individual habitus.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, it can be assumed that within the European context dominant groups control the power to promise, protect, and preserve their own interest by granting or refusing membership premised on the possession of linguistic capital. It seems fairly clear from the above-mentioned points that English as a *de facto* language policy in Europe is a promoter of a monolingual ideology, which regards it as the only language with symbolic capital. Gret Haller, the Ombudsperson for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina commented poignantly at the Council of Europe conference in 1999 on Linguistic Diversity for Democratic Citizenship in Europe, "No-one pays attention to what you say unless you speak English, because English is the language of power" (as cited in Phillipson, 2003, p. 5). Against this backdrop, as Blackledge (2001) maintains, multilingualism in Europe can be seen as a problem, and monolingualism as an asset.

8. Policy Formulation

The CEFR, shaped by the Council of Europe's moral, political, and social values, emerged as the result of 30 years of work on language teaching and learning. The European Cultural Convention, signed by the Member States at the end of 1954 can perhaps be a point of departure for the Council of Europe's work in the domain of modern languages and cultural cooperation in Europe. Its aim, as defined by the documents, is as follows:

> to foster among the nationals of all members, and of such other European States as may accede thereto, the study of the languages, history and civilisation of the others and of the civilisation which is common to them all. (CoE, 1954)

Three years later, the idea of a plan for the development of modern language teaching in Europe was initiated at the First Intergovernmental Conference on European cooperation in language teaching. The Council for Cultural Co-operation formed in 1962, was appointed to overlook educational and cultural matters.

In 1961, France pioneered the first audiovisual course for adult learners of the French language with a greater emphasis on visual content, which represented a departure from the traditional grammar-translation methodology. This influence is traceable in the CEFR's Threshold level model in the 1970s. Notably, at that time the US interest in language learning and teaching was more concerned with national security needs, particularly after the launch of the first artificial satellite by the USSR followed by the first space mission. It was the time when American linguists developed and introduced an audiolingual

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approach which was widely used by military personnel during World War II as the method which ensured fast and efficient language acquisition and which gradually seeped into Europe with the arrival of globalisation. Both methods were rejected in the 1970s by British linguists as they tended to ignore communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) needed for interaction between increasing numbers of adult migrants. Consequently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was born in the economic discourse of the capitalist system, promoting English as the lingua franca. It became central to CEFR's action-oriented approach, which views learners as "social agents" and "members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action" (CoE, 2001, p. 9).

The idea of CEFR levels, as North (1996) states, "did not suddenly appear from nowhere" (p. 8). The expansion of multilingual Europe and the increasing vocational and education mobility at that time posed great difficulty in recognising qualifications. Hence, the level taxonomy would serve as internationally recognised standards based on which decisions would be made with regard to admission to universities, and awarding qualifications, thereby solving, as Trim (Cambridge English, 2011) puts it, "Council of Europe's practical concerns". As stated earlier in the article, linguists played a significant role in the development of language policy in Europe. The 'guiding spirits' behind the CEFR, funded by the Swiss government, were John Trim, who had been the director of the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project for almost 30 years, Jan Ate van Ek, Brian North, Professor Daniel Coste, and Mr Joseph Sheils. They were also engaged in other important projects carried out by the Council of Europe in the field of foreign language learning.

One such project promulgating CLT was the Unit/Credit Scheme (1971-1977), with its set of principles that laid the foundation for CEFR. Among them are "languages for all", "languages are learnt for use", and "language learning is a life-long activity" (Trim, 2001). Other projects that followed, notably Project 4 (1977-1981) and The Threshold Level (1975), first formulated for the English language, further promoted the principles of the unification of language teaching developed by the unit-credit group. The latter was translated into more than 20 languages and provided a perspective on how languages are still learned today. According to the authors, the document would prove useful for "people who want to prepare themselves to communicate socially with people from other countries" (van Ek &Trim, 1998, p. 1). Seen this way, it would serve the Council of Europe's purpose "to achieve greater unity among its members" (CoE, 2001, p. 2). The CLT method that encouraged the global use of English would be ideal for this goal, as a 'gate opener' or, as the authors eloquently state, "the key that may unlock the door" (van Ek & Trim, 1998, p. 1).

It is noteworthy that Trim in his last interview before he died admitted that they [the authors] were sceptical about the use of levels in language in general. He also noted that the Threshold Level derived its name from the idea of a "crossing point" of language learning in the early stages (Smith & McLelland, 2014, p. 20). At the same time, his French colleagues fearing that one level with only one learning objective might be perceived as the European standard for language learning produced *Un Niveau-Seuil*

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(Coste et al., 1976), the French version of the Threshold model. Shortly after its success, the Threshold Level became formalised in educational institutions throughout Europe and soon was followed by a generous number of syllabi, textbooks, and tests. The Waystage Level (van Ek et al., 1980) was developed as a response to a criticism of the difficulty of the Threshold Level for beginners. A pre-Wastage level called Breakthrough was also developed by John Trim. The Vantage Level (van Ek & Trim, 2001) was conceived and emerged last, first for English in 1996, and later in 2001 for other languages.

In the 1990s, the spread of the Council of Europe's ideology in language teaching reached countries of the former Soviet bloc. By offering its vision on language policies in the form of consultancy, the Council of Europe inevitably transformed teachers' beliefs and attitudes about language teaching. The idea for the CEFR spawned at a symposium "Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe" held in Rüschlikon, Switzerland, in 1991 and took ten years to evolve. More than 1,000 copies of the First Draft were sent for feedback in 1995 and two versions of the Second Draft piloted in 1996 (CoE, 1996a, b) in English and French, received feedback from various experts. Over the next few years, the Waystage, Threshold, and Vantage levels were revised and in 2001 were fed into the final draft of the CEFR. Parallel to work on the CEFR, the Council of Europe commenced two more relevant projects, called Project 12: Language and Teaching Modern Languages for Communication (1982-1987) and Language Learning for European Citizenship (1990-1997) to aid national government reform in language teaching in secondary education. This period was marked by intensive work by teacher trainers sent out to disseminate a communicative language teaching methodology. Such an incentive seems very much in tune with the neoliberal one-size-fits-all standardised approach to language teaching.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a degree of convergence of views on testing internationally, which brought many interested stakeholders together. Among them, to name just a few, are the non-governmental organisation ALTE (The Association of Language Testers in Europe) funded by the University of Cambridge (UK) and the Universidad de Salamanca (Spain) in 1998 which were tasked with writing 'can do' statements for the Council of Europe's Framework. This work ran in sync with the development of the CEFR. Today, ALTE is known for its role as a quality auditing system for English language examinations. Another organisation, the DIALANG project, created diagnostic tests in several European languages. It is hardly a coincidence that CEFR sparked the interest of such major examining bodies that enhanced its symbolic power, such as the British Council, the Goethe Institut, Instituto de Cervantes, and Cambridge University.

9. The CEFR as an Instrument of Power. Final Thoughts

It is beyond the scope of my article to elaborate on the implementation stage of this policy, but let me briefly mention its unambiguous and absolute reception by all stakeholders driven by the idea 'for the greater good'. Could it be otherwise, when the positive wording of the document creates an illusory idea of non-imposition by using vocabulary like "non-prescriptive", "transparent", "open", and "user-friendly" (CoE, 2011, pp. 7-8)? The same can be said about the 'can do' statements, which, in a similar reassuring

manner, describe 'what learners *can* actually do in the foreign language' (CoE, 2001, p. 244) instead of what they *cannot*. The overall language of the reasoning behind the document played a considerable role in 'seducing' governments to accept the CEFR to frame their language policies. Yet, the principal contradiction lies between the non-dogmatic spirit of the document ('*We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do or how to do'* CoE, 2001, p. xi) and a CoE's appeal to the Member States to promote the use of the CEFR and to "ensure that the document is used in a valid way". It also suggests that governments may wish "to establish, if required, the legislative and administrative framework for implementing the Recommendation" (CoE, 1998.) Such contradictory rhetoric does not seem to be ideologically innocent to me.

While the CEFR added a valuable dimension to describing and measuring language levels, it has also attracted numerous critiques, especially in the last decade. It has been heavily attacked, particularly in recent years, for its atheoretical nature, its unsuitability for young learners, and the lack of empirical evidence to confirm the validity of scales and descriptors. Little (2016, p. 175) argues that the CEFR, based on the personal opinions of a small group of experts, specifies what learners should do but says nothing about how well they should do it. Furthermore, the scales assume native-like mastery of pronunciation, which "can be understood with some effort by native speakers used to dealing with speakers of his or her language group" (CoE, 2011, p.117), thus obliging non-native speakers of English to acquire the behavioural habits and linguistic forms of the hegemonic language. Other authors cast doubts on the nature of the document aligned with the market profit in language education (Littlejohn, 2012). Other criticisms focus on the CEFR as an instrument of power. Fulcher (2004), for example, observes that the CEFR "is rapidly becoming the 'system'", "the truth against which all else must be measured" (p. 260). The author also sees the centralisation visualised by the CEFR as a contradiction against the notion of plurilingualism, which could mean "less diversity, and less choice". Not created for migrants, CEFR and its standards are nevertheless used as a yardstick in measuring their competence, which, as Byrnes (2007) notes, is "a disregard of the origins of the CEFR" (p. 644). It is perceived as a norm, and a group possessing and controlling it is the one that, according to Bourdieu (1991), holds the largest linguistic capital and, therefore, has access to power through language.

10. Conclusion

The present analysis has sought to uncover the underlying ideological agendas of the Council of Europe and demonstrate how the CEFR as an instrument of power serves these agendas. Needless to say, this quest proved to be quite challenging. Indeed, as Shohamy (2001) observes, it is difficult "to tease out agendas out from a laudable desire to increase communication across the continent and reduce prejudice" (p. 263). It is, therefore, hoped that I have been able to shed light on issues central to European language policy, where the uncritical celebration of linguistic diversity, multilingualism, and plurilingualism seems questionable. It is also my hope that through Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital, one can be made aware of the hegemonic power of language and the benefits its knowledge entails for the privileged

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groups. It has also become evident that the increased use of English within and outside the EU intimately tied to the globalised economic imperatives stands in stark opposition to the principles enshrined in EU language policy. The covert promotion of monolingualism by the Council of Europe goes against its claim in relation to the principles of plurilingualism and points to a monolingual habitus as the norm that the CEFR has so successfully legitimised over the years. In this narrative, the CEFR holds symbolic power with its normative nature as a mechanism for creating and perpetuating disparities between different social groups.

Remarkably, years later, John Trim (Saville, 2005), in his reflections on the CEFR, lamented, "There will always be people who are trying to use it [the CEFR] as an instrument of power" (p. 282), and almost ten years later added, "... which they have done" (Smith & McLelland, 2014, p. 23). It appears that CEFR's present far-reaching and non-negotiable authority only reaffirms his prophecy.

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