

New Challenges in the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)

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(Received 26th October, 2010)

Abstract

This study deals with future language policies in Japan in the light of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), Council of Europe, with reference to the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL). Then this study discusses the possibility of Common Asian Framework of References for Languages: Learning, teaching, and assessment (CAFR) for the future prospects in language education in north east Asia.

This study claims that ELP, EPOSTL, and other relevant issues in the Council of Europe will give us important insights for the establishment of CAFR in north east Asia. Therefore it is necessary for east Asian countries to establish Council of North East Asia, a new organization for language policies and other relevant issues in north east Asia. Under this organization, the issues in CAFR can be discussed by the member states. This new organization which is a counter organization of the Council of Europe will surely play a major role not only in the framework of references for languages but also in cross cultural understanding, human rights, and ultimately, in the military options in north east Asia.

Key words: European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), European Language Portfolio (ELP), Common Asian Framework of Language for References (CAFR), Common European Framework of Language for References (CEFR), cross cultural understanding

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Introduction and rationale

Japan is now being left behind other countries in the world with respect to language policies. For example, European Union (EU), Republic of Korea (ROK), China, and Taiwan have already implemented new language policies particularly in foreign language education with some drastic changes for the past few decades (Otani, et.al., 2004), (Higuchi, 2007), (Higuchi, et.al, 2010). These countries already established their achievement targets in English language education as well as their curriculums in language education. Some of the curriculums in north east Asia were strongly influenced by “Can-do-assessment”, descriptors of competences related language learning under Common European Framework for References for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) in EU. The Council of Europe played important roles in the establishment of CEFR in 2001. And this council has a strong relation with EU.

What are the insights in language education policies from the Council of Europe? And how should we deal with them for the reform of language policies in Japan? For these purposes, this study particularly focuses on European Language Portfolio (ELP) and European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) as the two major language policies of the Council of Europe.

Then, this study discusses the establishment of a new organization of “the Council of North East Asia” in order to promote a Common Asian Framework of References for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CAFR) in north east Asia. They are not only language issues but also political and economical issues in different cultural and historical contexts in north east Asia. They are the key issues that are significantly important for us to discuss peaceful education and mutual cross cultural understandings for north east Asian countries.

The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe was established in Strasbourg, France in 1949 after the World War II. When the war ended in 1945, Europe was marked by unprecedented devastation and human suffering. Europe faced new political challenges, trying to find out reconciliation among the people of Europe. In 1943, Sir Winston Churchill spoke of a Council of Europe in a broadcast to the nation. In 1946, he also called for a United States of Europe and the establishment of a Council of Europe at the University of Zurich. Then in 1949 by the Treaty of London, the Council of Europe was finally founded.

The main domains of competence in the Council of Europe are “human rights”, “legal standards”, “democratic development”, “the rule of law”, “cultural co-operation”, “social cohesion and education”, “culture and heritage”, and “youth and sport”. The Council of Europe was spotlighted in 1975 when “*The Threshold Level in a European Unit/Credit System of Modern Language Learning by Adult*” was announced. There, the language proficiency standards were shown as a guideline for the learners, putting the emphases on “notion” and “function” of a language. This guideline was proceeded to CEFR in 2001

in which the language proficiency levels were shown in six levels from A1 to C2 (see appendix 1). The Council of Europe has now, as of 2010, 47 member states with about 800 million citizens, which is distinct from the European Union (EU). EU has common policies, binding laws and only 27 member states, which is in one of the oldest international organization working towards European integration. (Due to the main focus on ECML in this present study, the details in the Council of Europe are deleted)

ECML

The ECML (The European Centre for Modern Languages) of the Council of Europe is based in Graz, Austria. It is a Council of Europe institution in cooperation with the Language Policy Division of the Council in Strasbourg, France. The ECML functions as a catalyst for reform in the teaching and learning of languages. It was organized in bringing language education policies and practices together particularly for helping stakeholders in the 47 member states. Their major roles and activities in Graz are complementary to those of the Language Policy Division in Strasbourg. Therefore, their major roles and responsibilities are the elaboration of policies and guidelines for promoting linguistic diversity that is plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as well as the development of policy planning. The author of this study visited there Graz on August 17th, 2010 and found the recent innovation in the ECML from the interview with Dr. Susanna Slivensky the Deputy Executive Director and Head of Programs of the ECML.

Innovation in ECML

Two challenges in the ECML can be considered as the recent innovation. They are noteworthy for us in suggesting future language policies into practice in Japanese educational contexts. They are ELP (European Language Portfolio), and EPOSTL (European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages). ELP was established in 2001 when European Year of Languages was established by EU and the Council of Europe. These two new challenges are quite interesting for us to see the details because they have some insights to reform language policies in Japan, particularly in implementing foreign language education policies. Let us take the overview of the two challenges in the ECML.

ELP and Purposes

ELP (European Language Portfolio) was established in the year 2001 when CEFR was announced by EU. It is a tool for language learning and assessment of the learning, which is based on CEFR. There are about 70 in the development projects of ELP and they are certified by the Council of Europe. ELP is organized to promote language education policies in the Council of Europe.

The purposes of ELP can be summarized as follows: (1) to encourage the lifelong learning of languages to any level of proficiency, (2) to make the learning process more transparent and to develop the learner's ability

to assess his/her own competence, (3) to facilitate mobility within Europe by providing a clear profile of the owner's language skills, and (4) to contribute to mutual understanding within Europe by promoting plurilingualism that is the ability to communicate in two or more languages and intercultural learning. In other words, ELP is a document that people in the member states are learning or have learned a language. People in the member states can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences. It has three obligatory components: "a language passport", "a language biography", and "a dossier". Let us take a brief look at the three components.

Language Passport

It is used for the ELP owner to summarize the owner's linguistic identity, language learning achievement, and intercultural experience, and includes the owner's assessment of his/her own language competence according to the Council of Europe's Common Reference Levels. Language skills are divided into five: listening, reading, writing, spoken interaction, and spoken production. The language passport requires the owner to assess his or her own language skills according to the Council of Europe's common reference levels, which are elaborated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. (ELP, Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Language Biography

It is used for the ELP owner to set intermediate learning goals, review progress, and record significant language learning and intercultural experiences. Therefore, the owner can set up his/her own language learning plans and observe his/her learning process and fill them in the pages of a language biography. Therefore, a language biography is a kind of tool that accelerates reflective learning. (ibid)

Dossier

It is used for the ELP owner to collect samples of his/her work and evidence of his/her achievements in second/foreign language learning. Therefore, the ELP owner can record what he/she has achieved in learning his/her language studies and cultural studies as well such as project works, evidence of qualification in language learning, and feedbacks from teachers etc. (ibid)

ELP can be used by owners of all ages as in the following purposes: (1) to keep a record of all their language learning, whether it takes place inside or outside the educational system, (2) to develop their capacity to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning, (3) to record significant intercultural experiences, (4) to collect evidence of their language skills, and (5) to document their language learning achievements. In addition, educational institutions and individual teachers can also use the ELP as in the following purposes:

(1) to describe their courses and certificates more clearly by relating them to the Council of Europe's common reference levels, (2) to help learners to become self-managing, and (3) to make it easier for learners to show what they can do in languages when they move from one educational level or institution to another. Besides, employers can also use the ELP to inform themselves about the language skills of actual or potential employees, and to define the language skills that are required for a particular job.

ELP, as we have seen, has functions in many respects though, we cannot say whether or not it has been wide spread across the member states in the Council of Europe. In fact, nobody knew ELP among 12 teachers of English language in the middle and high schools in Europe. They came to IALS (Institute of Applied Language Studies) for taking one of the teachers' courses at the University of Edinburgh in August, 2010. The class comprised of 12 teachers of English, 5 from Poland, 5 from Catalonia, Spain, 1 from Liechtenstein, and 1 from Japan. Therefore, majority people in the class came from Europe but they had no idea about ELP, which means that ELP has not widespread yet across the member states in the Council of Europe. There fore, it will take time for us to see the effective results of ELP.

EPOSTL

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) can be considered as a reflection tool for language teachers' education. This project is based on CEFR, ELP, and Profile (European Profile for Language Teacher Education). According to Newby et. al. (2007), EPOSTL is defined as follows:

“ ...The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a document for students undergoing initial teacher education. It will encourage you to reflect on your didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, helps you to assess your own didactic competences and enables you to monitor your progress and to record your experiences of teaching during the course of your teacher education....”

(Newby et. al. 2007:5)

EPOSTL is comprised of the following sections: (1) personal statement, (2) self-assessment, (3) dossier, (4) glossary, (5) index, and (6) users' guide, in which self-assessment (can-do assessment) is the heart of the EPOSTL. There are the 193 descriptors of competences related to language teaching in “can-do assessment”. These descriptors are important for language teachers to strive to attain. Let us take a brief look at some of the examples as follows:

1. I can understand the requirements set in national and local curricula.

2. I can design language courses around the requirements of the national and local curricula.

(quoted from No.1 and 2 in Curriculum, Newby, et. al., 2007:15)

1. I can promote the value and benefits of language learning to learners, parents and others.

2. *I can appreciate and make use of the value added to the classroom environment by learners with diverse cultural backgrounds.* (quoted from *The Role of the Language Teacher*, *ibid*)

1. *I can select texts appropriate to the needs, interests and language level of the learners.*

2. *I can provide a range of pre-listening activities which help learners to orientate themselves to a text.* (quoted from No.1 and 2 in *Listening*, *ibid*:25)

Newby et. al. (*ibid*) shows the main aims of the EPOSTL as follows:

1. to encourage you to reflect on the competences a teacher strives to attain and on the underlying knowledge which feeds these competences;
2. to help prepare you for your future profession in a variety of teaching contexts;
3. to promote discussion between you and your peers and between you and your teacher educators and mentors;
4. to facilitate self-assessment of your developing competence;
5. to provide an instrument which helps chart progress. (ibid:5)

The 193 descriptors of competences in the EPOSTL seem to have been successful, according to Newby (*ibid*), particularly the reactions to the EPOSTL have been positive by language teachers across the Europe. According to the keynote speech by Newby, the ECML received a number of applications from member states to translate EPOSTL into local languages, and 11 translations were published (see note 1).

Some researchers and research groups in Japan also showed strong interest to EPOSTL recently. Particularly those who are in charge of teaching EFL methodologies and student teachers' education in foreign languages, mostly English language education at college or university, have shown strong interests to EPOSTL (Koike, 2009:14-19), (Sakai, 2009:20-25), (Jimbo et. al. 2010), and Hisamura (2010:16-30). Why did the EPOSTL give some influence on Japanese college teachers of English and other foreign language teachers of German and French? There are Japanese college teachers of English who are keen on introducing the EPOSTL to Japanese college student teachers' education in their teaching practicum at junior and senior high schools.

Should we introduce the ideas of the EPOSTL for student teachers' education when they participate in language teaching practicum? And if so, how should we deal with this issue when implementing the idea of the EPOSTL to Japanese educational institutions? Is it possible for us to adopt directly the 193 descriptors of competences related to language teaching to Japanese contexts? Basic questions and issues can be considered from the EPOSTL, when adopting the descriptors of self-assessment in the EPOSTL. They can be summarized in the following four issues:

- (1) Why is the tool like the EPOSTL necessary to student language teachers' education in Japan? The EPOSTL was established by the Council of Europe as a reflection tool for student language teachers' education in European contexts. And this project is based on CEFR, ELP, and Profile (European Profile for Language Teacher Education), which was established under the Council of Europe but not in Japan.
- (2) Are all the 193 descriptors of competences in the self-assessment applicable to student language teachers' education in Japanese context?
- (3) How can we introduce them and promote them to student teachers' education of languages in Japanese context?
- (4) Should we consider solely English language when implementing the tool like the EPOSTL in Japanese contexts? If so, why? And if not, why not?

They are the main issues to consider when adopting EPOSTL, which are discussed respectively in light of the reform in foreign language education in Japanese contexts. This study suggests that the JPOSTL (by the acronym of Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages) should be created under the Japanese contexts. And it does not necessarily mean only English language but other foreign languages in North East Asia. This will be discussed later on when discussing the establishment of CAFR (Common Asian Framework of Languages for References).

Implications from EPOSTL and JPOSTL

This study suggests that the JPOSTL be a tool for student language teachers' education. Therefore, the JPOSTL in Japan should be considered as a similar policy as the EPOSTL in EU. The following four issues are important:

- (1) This study takes the view that the JPOSTL is necessary for Japanese college students to be introduced to Japan as a reflection tool for student language teachers' education. This is mainly because the assessment of teaching practicum for student teachers of English is not as properly conducted in details as in the EPOSTL that contains seven disciplines: context, methodologies, resources, lesson planning, conducting a lesson, independent learning, and assessment of learning. In fact, there is no reflective practicing in the teaching practicum in Japan when student teachers of languages are engaged in their teaching practicum at Japanese junior and senior high schools.

It is important for us to recognize that the JPOSTL should be based on Japanese standards of instructions

of languages, not on the basis of the EPOSTL, because the EPOSTL was established in the European contexts under the Council of Europe. Therefore, we should consider the JPOSTL should be based on Japanese contexts, which should not include only English language but also include other foreign languages such as Chinese and Korean. Particularly, some local languages in north east Asia should be included for some reasons. This is discussed later on in this study.

(2) All the 193 descriptors of competences in the self-assessment in EPOSTL are not necessary to student teachers' education of languages in JPOSTL. This is because English language instruction in middle schools, for example, is based on the Course of Study by the Ministry of Education (MEXT) in Japan. And there are some descriptors in the EPOSTL, and they are not applicable to English language instruction in Japanese educational contexts. For example, most senior high schools in Japan have not introduced immersion instruction, so that other class subjects except English subject are not currently conducted through the medium of English language in most high schools. Therefore, the descriptors of competences in the self-assessment in the JPOSTL should be arranged to student teachers' education of languages in light of Japanese context in language instructions.

(3) There are some important steps when introducing and promoting the JPOSTL to student teachers' education of languages in Japanese context. First, we need to have a consensus in descriptors of competences in the self-assessment applicable to student teachers' education of languages. Particularly descriptors in English language teaching should be established first. Jimbo et.al. (2010) made some arrangement of the EPSOTL for Japanese standards and reduced some descriptors in the EPOSTL, trying to make better descriptors of competences in the self-assessment for Japanese contexts. It takes time to establish the final descriptors of competences in the self-assessment, but we need them for students who engage in teaching practicum mostly in English teaching practicum at school.

Second, both the MEXT and the municipal board of education should promote the JPOSTL to every school in the community, otherwise, teaching practicum for the student teachers will not be successful due to the different achievement targets depending on individual school in the community even in the same municipal board of education.

Third, the MEXT should suggest a minimum guideline for the teaching practicum for course subjects at college and university. For instance, some achievement targets should be shown in the course subject in TEFL. This is because, the course contents in TEFL vary depending on individual course teachers in individual college and university. There are a number of student teachers who have almost no idea about how to write teaching plan of English language when they engage in teaching practicum in English language at junior and senior high schools in Japan. This is the reality we should bear in mind.

(4) The JPOSTL in English language should be established first for the teaching practicum. Most foreign language instructions have been implemented solely in English language for the past decades. However, in the future, the JPOSTL should be improved from solely English language instruction to other foreign languages' instructions including local languages in north east Asia. And Japanese language instruction should also be included as a national language. Why should other foreign languages be included into the JPOSTL in the future? This is the issue strongly concerned with the establishment of Common Asian Framework for References for Languages: learning, teaching, and assessment (CAFR). This is discussed in the next chapter with emphasis on the establishment of a new organization, "the Council of North East Asia" the counter organization of the Council of Europe.

CAFR

The issue of CAFR has often been discussed among researchers and policy makers in east Asia, particularly since 2001 when CEFR was established in EU. The establishment of CAFR seems to be a grand experiment for Asian people, but this study claims that it is necessary for the people in east Asia (not only in north east Asia but also all east Asia) due to the following reasons:

- for the development of democracy
- for the collaboration and mutual understandings
- for the cultural and academic exchanges
- for the educational supporting programs
- for the human right education
- for the cross cultural understandings
- for the peaceful education and renunciation of war

They are the main reasons for the establishment of CAFR. This is mainly because language policies in north east Asia have been implemented by economic basis for individuals and individual nations in the market mechanism rather than peaceful education, human right, development of democracy, and mutual cross cultural understandings. Therefore, language policies in north east Asia have been conducted by the practical economic basis in the market mechanism.

This should totally be improved. The ultimate aims in the language policies in the world should be discussed toward the world peace, mutual understanding, and above all, renunciation of war. This is the most important and the ultimate target for language policies in the world. If we take some historical overview in EU and the Council of Europe, we could see why these two organizations were established after World War II in Europe, and how their language policies have been successfully implemented into

practice in 47 member states in the Council of Europe.

Here, again we have to think about the keys for the Council of Europe: “human rights”, “legal standards”, “democratic development”, “the rule of law”, “cultural co-operation”, “social cohesion and education”, and “culture and heritage” and “youth and sport”. Indeed, when the World War II ended in 1945, Europe was marked by unprecedented devastation and human suffering. Europe faced new political challenges, trying to find out reconciliation among the peoples of Europe. Then the Council of Europe was established in Strasbourg, France in 1949. In light of this historical background of the Council of Europe, this study claims that ultimate aims for language policies in Japan should be established for peaceful, mutual coexistence and ultimately renunciation of war in north east Asia. .

Therefore, the issue of CAFR is very important for us to discuss because it could play some major roles and responsibilities for mutual cross cultural understandings among the people in east Asia. And we do not necessarily have to begin with the “Can-do assessment” in the achievement target of learning foreign languages, when discussing the establishment of CAFR. The first step we should deal with is to establish an organization “the Council of North East Asia” that deals with not only language policies but also other relevant issues in north east Asia: such as: “human rights”, “legal standards”, “democratic development”, “the rule of law”, “cultural co-operation”, “youth and sport” and other relevant issues just as those in the Council of Europe has implemented for the past decades.

The Council of North East Asia

This study suggests that the roles and responsibilities in the Council of North East Asia should include some of those in the Council of Europe. This is the first step for north east Asian countries to do for the establishment of CAFR that deals with the framework of references for languages, teaching, and assessment in north east Asia. This organization is necessary to be established not only for language policies, but also for human rights education, improvement of democracy, peaceful education, and rule of law in north east Asia.

However, under current crucial diplomatic and political issues, it is very difficult to establish this new organization in north east Asia. Many people in north east Asian countries have their strong nationalism against other countries such as the issues between China vs. Japan, Korea vs. Japan, and China vs. Taiwan, etc. Political and diplomatic issues also exist in North Korea. The situation when the Council of Europe was established in 1949 is totally different from the one in north east Asia. This study, therefore, suggests to establish some educational supporting programs for the people in north east Asia. This is because education supporting programs have given benefits to many people in EU, and they have been successful in the programs as in Socrates, Comenius, Erasmus, Grundvig, Lingua, Tempus, Youth, and Leonardo da Vinci. By the educational supporting programs, people in north east Asia can start moving to different

nations, studying specific genre they are interested in, socializing people in different cultural and historical contexts. This is the first step for us to do toward the establishment of the Council of North East Asia and of CAFR in the future.

Conclusion and future prospects

As we discussed in the first chapter, European Union (EU), Republic of Korea (ROK), China, and Taiwan have already implemented language policies with some drastic changes for the past few decades. These countries already established their achievement targets in English language education as well as their curriculums in foreign language education. Indeed, language policies in the world have been drastically changing for the past few decades.

The United States of America has also implemented language policies with some drastic changes for the past few decades. ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2006) announced the achievement targets in FLL (Standard for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century). Besides, there have been controversy among people in the issue of NCLB (No Child Left Behind), Crawford (2000, 2002), Dicker (2003), and Menken (2008). Another prominent example can be seen in the program of STARTALK at NFLC (National Foreign Language Center), the University of Maryland. Seven foreign languages have been promoted as strategic foreign languages in the U.S. The U.S. Department of Education has put emphases on language policies in the U.S. with about 460 languages are currently spoken in the U.S. (see note 2).

Language policies in the world, as we have seen, have been significantly changing except Japan for the past few decades. These changes are unfortunately based on economic and political basis under the market mechanism. Language policies in the world should be based on human rights, development of democracy, and ultimately renunciation of war. This study, therefore, suggests to establish “the Council of North East Asia” not only for the language policies and relevant issues but also for promoting human rights, the development of democracy, and ultimately for renunciation of war.

In order to establish this new organization, this study first claims to establish educational supporting programs in North East Asia. These programs will surely play important roles and responsibilities for the people to study abroad and to socialize people in different cultural and historical contexts in north east Asia. It is not politics and diplomacy but educational and cultural exchanges that can play major roles for the establishment of the new organization of “the Council of North East Asia”. Then throughout this organization, the issue of CAFR can be discussed among the member states with emphasis on not only language issues but also human rights, mutual cross cultural understanding, and ultimately renunciation of war in north east Asia.

Notes

(1) Newby's keynote speech can be found under the title of *Bridging the gap between language policy and practice: 15 years of ECML projects*.

(http://www.coe.int/t/dc/files/source/2010_graz_disc_newby_doc)

(2) The U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Intelligence have been promoting seven foreign languages as a national strategic project STARTALK. They are Chinese, Spanish, Russian, German, French, Japanese, and Persian languages. STARTALK has been planned and announced by National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland, College Park, M.D. The author of this study had a chance to visit there for the interview with the Director of the Center in 2007 and 2008.

Appendix

A1: Breakthrough, corresponding to what Wilkins in his 1978 proposal labeled 'Formulaic Proficiency', and Trim in the same publication 'Introductory'.

A2: Waystage, reflecting the Council of Europe content specification.

B1: Threshold, reflecting the Council of Europe content specification.

B2: Vantage, reflecting the third Council of Europe content specification, a level described as 'Limited Operational Proficiency' by Wilkins, and 'adequate response to situations normally encountered' by Trim.

C1: Effective Operational Proficiency which was called 'Effective Proficiency' by Trim, 'Adequate Operational Proficiency' by Wilkins, and represents an advanced level of competence suitable for more complex work and study tasks.

C2: Mastery (Trim: 'comprehensive mastery'; Wilkins: 'Comprehensive Operational Proficiency'), corresponds to the top examination objective in the scheme adopted by ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe). It could be extended to include the more developed intercultural competence above that level which is achieved by many language professionals. " Council of Europe (2001:23)

Another salient feature in CEFR is action-oriented approach described as follows:

" ...This approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views

users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. 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. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning...."

Council of Europe (2001:9)

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Susanna Slivensky, Deputy Executive Director and Head of Programmes, ECML. Thanks to her kind help and support, I could manage to have some interviews with her and with Anna Kerl, Chief staff of Public Relations, ECML. I sincerely appreciate for their kindness, useful information, and publications with printed matters of ECML.

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