

# THE METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN THE TEACHING OF FRENCH SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF THE CEFR, AN ANEMIC FIELD IN NEED OF HEALTHY POLEMICS

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## Acronym

CEFR: *Common European Framework of Reference* (2001)

FFL: French as Foreign Language

## ABSTRACT

After an analysis of the underlying epistemology of the CEFR, characterized by the "ideology of consensual communication", the "ideology of expertise" and the "scientific ideology", the author makes a very critical assessment of the current situation of the didactics of French as a foreign language (FFL) in France. 1) The question of methodology, evacuated by the authors of the CEFR and deserted by the majority of didacticians, constitutes a work in progress to be urgently resumed. 2) "[The] reverence of most French didacticians towards this document, on which for years they have poured ad nauseam respectful glosses worthy of biblical exegesis, as well as the silence of almost all the others (including the authors of the CEFR), are cruel revelations and a damning historical testimony of the level of intellectual anemia to which the didactics of the FFL has fallen in France." 3) "[...] it seems that the whole didactics of the FFL in France has become too anemic to carry and carry out public controversies on any issue, and that it can only generate latent dissensions or aborted debates."

*In a democracy, individuals and groups share a national space where they must coexist not only with their differences ("differences", in French), but also with their differences ("différends", in French). [...]*

*Pluralist society is by definition governed by conflict and the confrontation of antagonistic positions [...]. This is precisely where polemics comes in.*

*In a pluralist democracy, everyone has the right not only to maintain, but also to try to make his position prevail in its ideological and identity components. From this point of view, the persuasion of the adversary as adherence to a common response is no longer the horizon of the verbal confrontation. We are in a rhetoric of dissensus where the persistence of disagreement is not a sign of failure, but a characteristic of democratic functioning.*

Ruth AMOSSY, *Apologie de la polémique* [*Apology of the polemic*] <sup>1</sup>,  
2014, p 214 & p 215.

## INTRODUCTION

Exergues sometimes have a function close to that of pots of succulents in building entrances: nicely, consensually decorative. This is not the case of the one I have chosen for the entrance of the present article (see above), which should already strongly call my readers to reflection, and if need be to reread it: it indeed makes it possible to become aware of the impressive gap which exists today in the didactics of the FFL (French as foreign Language) between the stakes traditionally covered by the communicative-intercultural approach, and those with which the citizens living and working in their multilingual and multicultural democratic societies are confronted. The sociologist Jacques DEMORGON thus shows in his work how much social cultures are currently worked on from the inside by the "fundamental multicultural, transcultural, intercultural antagonism"<sup>2</sup>, and from the outside by the phenomena of migration as well as by the opposing processes of globalization and identity claims<sup>3</sup>; and Bernard LAHIRE (1998, 2004) how much the identity of their members is a veritable cultural patchwork, to the point that the meeting between two people from different countries, however long it lasts –as is the case in living and working together– is neither an intercultural encounter (ie between two cultures of which these people are only more or less conscious carriers), nor an encounter between two individuals (who would play with their cultural codes as consciously as their linguistic codes)<sup>4</sup>. This intercultural encounter is in fact a series of largely unpredictable episodes of random collisions between the flows of cultural particles constantly circulating within the interactional processes.

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<sup>1</sup> A linguist specializing in discourse analysis, Ruth AMOSSY reviews the literature on "democratic dissensus" before illustrating it with the example of three public controversies: in France, the wearing of the Burqa and the distribution of bonuses and stock options to major company directors; in Israel, the question of "the exclusion of women" among the Jewish ultra-Orthodox.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques DEMORGON, *Critique de l'interculturel. L'horizon de la sociologie* [*Criticism of the intercultural. The horizon of sociology*], 2005a.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques DEMORGON 2005b. See also 2000: *Complexité des cultures et de l'interculturel* [*Complexity of cultures and interculturality*].

<sup>4</sup> On these two major successive conceptions of the intercultural approach, which have in common that they reduce the encounter to a contact between two entities, cf. PUREN 1998f.

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## 1. THE IDEOLOGY OF CONSENSUAL COMMUNICATION

However, the communicative-intercultural approach has remained at the level of its original "social situation of reference"<sup>5</sup>, that of exchanges between interlocutors of different cultures communicating to get to know each other or to inform each other, going at most as far as the issues of "communicative action" as conceived by Jürgen HABERMAS<sup>6</sup>, where the interlocutors sincerely seek consensus through the rational confrontation of their arguments: <sup>7</sup>

*The greater the measure of communicative rationality, the wider the margin of play within a communicative community that allows for the non-violent coordination of actions and the conciliation of conflicts through consensus (insofar as these conflicts refer to cognitive dissonance in the narrow sense). (p. 31)*

In such a conception of the social action of language, the respect of differences is indeed a necessary and sufficient condition for its good realization.

But the social action of language by citizens in their own multicultural societies has little to do with that of tourists in a foreign country, foreign students on an Erasmus course, foreign learners of French as a foreign language passing through language centers in France, or even teachers invited for a few months in a foreign university. In the daily and permanent reality of multicultural societies, as soon as the different cultures are not satisfied with merely rubbing shoulders, but interact –in other words, as soon as these societies want to be multicultural– this social action of language is not only an exchange where one endeavors to kindly co-construct the meaning of a common dialogue: it is also a protest, a claim, an affirmation, a mobilization, a fight against adversaries, who are not enemies because they are recognized as having the right to disagree and to defend their ideas. There is an English expression used to close a debate if there is disagreement, and which expresses the essence of democracy: "*Let's agree to disagree*"... <sup>8</sup>

In societies that cultivate cultural pluralism, democracy must necessarily be pluralist, and in a pluralist democracy, those who claim a personal right to "indifference to differences", or a collective right to reject differences that they consider to be contrary to the values that form the basis of the social bond, whether they be universal or local, have every legitimacy to defend their ideas: in a pluralist society, the fundamental principle is not respect for differences, but respect for disagreements. Paradoxically, among the defenders of multiculturalism, who are to be found in large numbers among specialists in intercultural education, there is a great intolerance towards any position that would relativize their own cultural relativism; towards the position, for example, of those who recognize multiculturalism as a sociological observation but reject it as a social project.

It is time that the didactics of the FFL takes into account "the inevitability of the exchanges based on a strong dissentiment and the capital role of the antagonism in democracy" (AMOSSY 2014, p. 37); that it leaves this "contemporary dialogic angelism" that Pierre-André TAGUIEFF

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<sup>5</sup> On this concept, see PUREN 029.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen HABERMAS 1981. This philosopher situates himself in the lineage of Anglo-Saxon pragmatic philosophy, where we find in particular Paul Grice and his logical rules of conversation that all interlocutors should respect in the name of a general principle of cooperation.

<sup>7</sup> This criticism of the *CEFR* is one of the criticisms of the document that German-speaking educationalists have systematically accumulated during a conference entitled "The *CEFR* under discussion" held in Tübingen in 2002. The proceedings were published in 2003. In Anne FRIEDERIKE DELOUIS's (2008) report, for example, we read: "According to Hans Barkowski, this is a concept of ideal communication (in the sense of Habermas): the facts communicated are always real, there is a consensus between those who participate in the communication and who also consider themselves equal partners. According to this same researcher, this type of communication is rather that of the socio-cultural elite [...]" (p. 25).

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank my colleague Jean Max Thompson for this report.

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denounced already a quarter of century ago, and which is still one of the ideological characteristics of the language. 37); that it gets out of this "contemporary dialogical angelism" that Pierre-André TAGUIEFF denounced already a quarter of a century<sup>9</sup> ago, and which is still one of the ideological characteristics of the current orientation of the "Language Policy Unit" (formerly "Language Policy Division") of the Council of Europe. It is certainly not from the current "experts" of this organization that we should expect this effort of aggiornamento, they who have returned to the concept of "intercultural competence" <sup>10</sup>when the authors of the *CEFR* had introduced the concept of "*pluricultural* competence", and who have abandoned all development of the actional perspective that the *CEFR* had nevertheless outlined, in order to return to the communicative approach alone, even though it is insufficient to manage all the plurilingual teaching devices that they are promoting elsewhere.

The authors of the *CEFR* –whom I did not hear protesting against this incredible intellectual regression, nor even being surprised by the new key expression of the European "experts", as conceptually shaky as it is epistemologically improbable, that of "*plurilingual* and intercultural education"<sup>11</sup>– have a good share of responsibility in this matter. Their entire project is in fact based on the same ideology, which has been the Council of Europe's since its creation, and which corresponds to what Ruth AMOSSY calls "the utopia of a pacifying consensus" (2014, p. 214)<sup>12</sup>.

The mark of this ideology can be found, for example, in this grid of the *CFER* (p. 86), which deals precisely with a social action, "to cooperate", for which communication is not an end, but a means:

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<sup>9</sup> "Political argumentation. Discourse analysis and new rhetoric", p. 273. *Hermès* 8-9/1990, pp. 261-278. Quoted in AMOSSY 2014, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*. By Jean-Claude Beacco, Michael Byram, Marisa Cavalli et al., 2016, 166 p. Online:

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900016806ae621>.

<sup>11</sup> On this point, as on others over the last ten years, I have tried, again without success, to launch a contradictory debate among FLE didacticians: see PUREN 2012/06/21.

<sup>12</sup> This criticism of the *CEFR* can already be found among all the criticisms that German-speaking didacticians have systematically accumulated on this document during a conference held in 2002 in Tübingen and entitled "The CEFR under discussion". For example, in Anne FRIEDERIKE DELOUIS's (2008) report on the proceedings, she wrote about "communication" in the *CEFR*: "According to Hans Barkowski, this is a concept of ideal communication (in the sense of Habermas): the facts communicated are always real, there is a consensus between those who participate in the communication and who also consider themselves equal partners. According to this same researcher, this type of communication is rather that of the socio-cultural elite [...]. » (p. 25).

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	<b>CO-OPERATING</b>
<b>C2</b>	As C1
<b>C1</b>	Can relate own contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.
<b>B2</b>	Can give feedback on and follow up statements and inferences and so help the development of the discussion. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground, confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.
<b>B1</b>	Can exploit a basic repertoire of language and strategies to help keep a conversation or discussion going. Can summarise the point reached in a discussion and so help focus the talk.
	Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding and help keep the development of ideas on course. Can invite others into the discussion.
<b>A2</b>	Can indicate when he/she is following.
<b>A1</b>	No descriptor available

Below, I repeat verbatim the comments I made on the descriptor of the C1-C2 levels of this grid in a 2009 article (PUREN 2009c):

*[...] here we are really in the midst of a communicativist ideology, which the authors of the CEFR have decidedly failed to overcome: in order to cooperate well, it is not enough to communicate well; knowing how to communicate obviously makes it possible to solve communicational problems, but it does not make it possible to solve, and may on the contrary have the effect of obscuring, the actional problems (i.e. the different conceptions of action) and the different stakes in the action (personal, collective and social). The actional effectiveness requires that these problems and stakes are clarified and debated by the social actors, to the point of assuming the risks of confrontation and even rupture: it is precisely the competences necessary to these activities of clarification, debate (confrontation of ideas) and management of what was formerly called the "dynamics of group" (confrontation of people and groups) which are the "high level" competences expected from a social actor. (p. 22)*

The same ideology of consensual dialogue can logically be found in the type of communication that the authors of the *CEFR* say in their text that they want to establish with teachers. Consider this passage:

*Today, there are many ways of learning and teaching modern languages. For many years, the Council of Europe has encouraged a methodology based on the communicative needs of learners and the adoption of methods and materials appropriate to their characteristics and to meet those needs. However, [...] the Framework is not intended to promote a particular teaching method but to present options. An exchange of information about these options and experience with them must come from the field. [...]*

*If some practitioners, after reflection, remain convinced that the objectives of the public for which they are responsible are best achieved by methods other than those advocated elsewhere by the Council of Europe, we would like them to let us know and to tell us and the other partners what methods they use and what objectives they pursue. Such an exchange could lead to a broader understanding of the diversity and complexity of the world of language teaching, to a debate on the subject, which is always preferable to an acceptance of the dominant thinking essentially because it is dominant. (p. 110)*

It is clear, in fact, that the authors do not intend to change their minds, because they are convinced that any contrary opinions of teachers would not really be well-founded (cf. "If some practitioners, after reflection, remain convinced...": *sic!*), and that they only invite them to this debate because it is the sign of the democracy they claim (cf. the end of the quote). Their request does not even aim at the common search for truth through the rational confrontation of arguments, as in Habermas's case: it is in reality a purely formal request for participation whose only function is to show their readers that their approach is democratic.

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## 2. THE IDEOLOGY OF EXPERTISE

How can the authors of the *CEFR*, "experts" of the Council of Europe, seriously invite teachers to debate democratically, i.e. on an equal footing with them, in the very text of the final edition published under the seal of this international organization, and by an official publisher –Les Éditions Didier– which presents this document on the back cover? :

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is the result of more than ten years of research by leading linguists in the 41 member states of the Council of Europe. The drafts that preceded this final result were subject to wide consultation and resulted in this very important contribution to applied linguistics and modern language teaching.*

How could ten years later these "experts" agree to participate in an anniversary round table organized by Didier Editions, at the February 2011 Expolangues fair, entitled "Le *Cadre* a fait le tour du monde, mais le monde a fait le tour du *Cadre*?"? [The Frame has been around the world, but has gone the world been around the Frame?] I maintain here the comment I made about this preposterous title in a 2012 article (PUREN 2012a): "If ridicule killed, the world would have had one less publisher and a few less speakers in the last two months, who seem to take language teachers for a troupe of simpletons whose devotion can be maintained with a lot of incense. » (p. 4)

A Marxist analyst would undoubtedly feed this necessary and salutary polemic in a different way, by affirming that the posture of the authors of the *CEFR* is characteristic of formal bourgeois democracy, where the call for respect of differences is, for its representatives, consciously or unconsciously, only a pretext to maintain their own differences, those which guarantee their own domination. Even if one does not share this idea, one must consider its expression as legitimate because it contributes to make the didactics of language-cultures a space of democratic debate.

What I am sure of, for my part, is that the two ideologies of consensual communication and expertise function in a complementary way to block any conflicting or even simply contradictory debate: either there is consensus, in fact, or the debate is decided by the experts. However, as Ruth Amossy writes, "it is undoubtedly the conflict of opinions that predominates in the contemporary democratic space that respects diversity and freedom of thought and expression" (p. 13), so that "in practical argumentation **focused on action and not on truth** [...] *dissensus* is not an anomaly to be corrected" (p. 42). I emphasize: "the revalorization of dissensus in the social sciences"<sup>13</sup> is directly related to the shift from the paradigm of communication to the paradigm of action that has taken place over the last twenty years in contemporary ideas, including in language-culture didactics, where it explains in large part the emergence of the actional perspective.<sup>14</sup>

As one of many examples of this revaluation of dissensus in the social sciences, a "multidisciplinary colloquium" was held on May 5-6, 2015 at the Catholic University of Angers on the theme "the value of disagreement." The call for papers states that "the aim will be to highlight the social, moral and political functions of disagreement, particularly in a democratic framework open to the diversity of ideological, political and religious positions."<sup>15</sup> More than 30 years ago, when the didactics of languages and cultures completed its disciplinary maturation by opening up, from its original methodological perspective, to the didactic perspective in the 1970s, and then to the didactological perspective in the 1980s (cf. PUREN 1994a, 2010), it was at the same time confronted with ethical, epistemological, and ideological issues that by their

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<sup>13</sup> Title of a chapter in the book (pp. 35 ff)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. PUREN 2013e, text entitled "Le passage du paradigme de la communication au paradigme de l'action, et ses implications dans la mise en œuvre pratique de la perspective actionnelle".

<sup>15</sup> [www.uco.fr/evenements/valeurdesaccord/appel-a-communications/](http://www.uco.fr/evenements/valeurdesaccord/appel-a-communications/) (accessed April 16, 2015).

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very nature can never be closed in the name of scientific knowledge, and that must constantly remain open to both democratic and scientific debate.

### 3. THE SCIENTIFIC IDEOLOGY

It is surprising that the *scientific* committee of this conference in Angers did not consider the value of disagreement in the *sciences*, even though they also function on the basis of contradictory debate. And this debate goes if necessary –as we regularly see in the scientific news– to the point of polemics and the public denunciation of impostures.

For decades, some authors have argued that science progresses not by linear accumulation of consensual truths, but by debates and contradictory experiments, eradication of errors<sup>16</sup> and paradigmatic breaks<sup>17</sup>. In any intellectually dynamic field, as Edgar Morin nicely writes, truths are "biodegradable, that is to say, mortal, that is to say, living" (1990, p. 66). In a polemical work, as was his entire oeuvre (*Contre la méthode. Esquisse d'une théorie anarchiste de la connaissance*, 1975), Paul Feyerabend goes even further by defending a "pluralist" conception of science, which would progress by multiplication of rival theories and methodologies:

*A scientist who wishes to extend the empirical content of his conceptions as far as possible, and who wants to understand them as clearly as possible, must therefore introduce other conceptions: that is, he must adopt a pluralistic methodology. He must compare ideas with other ideas rather than with "experience", and he must try to improve rather than reject conceptions that have failed in the struggle. (p. 27)*

E. Morin is critical of this integral relativism of P. Feyerabend. We can understand it –scientific relativism must indeed be itself relativized, like cultural relativism–, but we could point out to E. Morin that he himself introduces the principle of relativism in the heart of thought, when he affirms that it cannot be relativized. Morin himself introduces the principle of relativism at the heart of thought, when he affirms that it can only face complexity if it accepts its "logical incapacity to avoid contradictions" (1990 p. 92): the first of the three principles of complexity, as he defines it, is "the dialogical principle [that] allows us to maintain duality within unity. It associates two terms that are at the same time complementary and antagonistic" (*id.*, p. 99). Now it is precisely the acceptance of contradiction that P. Feyerabend quotes when he summarizes his epistemological position as follows:

*[...] if there is a contradiction between an interesting new theory and a set of well-established facts, the best procedure is not to abandon the theory, but to use it to discover the hidden principles responsible for the contradiction. Cross-induction is an essential part of such a discovery process. (p. 81)*

This is exactly how language didactics has been enriched in the course of time, so as to constitute complex models integrating the consideration of contrary<sup>18</sup> actions, such as the model of "methods" in the sense of minimal units of methodological coherence (cf. PUREN 008) and that of cognitive models of teaching-learning (cf. PUREN 016). I do not know if this amounts to adopting an "anarchist theory of knowledge", but I consider valid for the discipline of language and culture teaching such statements of P. Feyerabend as: "The only principle that does not hinder progress is: *everything is good*.<sup>19</sup>" (p. 7); "Let there be any rule: however 'fundamental' and 'necessary' it may be for science, there will always be circumstances in which it is preferable

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<sup>16</sup> For Karl Popper (*The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1935), the criterion of scientificity of a theory is its "falsifiability" or "refutability": a theory is scientific only if it admits the possibility of being false.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962.

<sup>18</sup> How can the teacher encourage learners to use an inductive or deductive approach, a global or analytical approach, reflection or automatism; be flexible or rigorous, have them work individually or collectively; focus on the content or the form of the learners' productions, etc.?

<sup>19</sup> "*Anything goes*", in the original text.

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not only to ignore it, but to adopt the opposite rule" (p. 21); or again: "There is no idea, however ancient and absurd, which is not capable of advancing our knowledge" (p. 48).

These ideas inevitably bring to mind eclecticism, to which I devoted an essay in 1994 (PUREN 1994e). But, since the following year –since twenty years, therefore– I no longer speak of eclecticism in didactics, but of "complex didactics". Eclecticism has historically been the constant response of practitioners to the complexity of the teaching-learning process, impossible to manage by any single methodology since its global coherence does not allow it to manage opposing demands. The pluralistic practices of teachers could only be perceived as eclectic by didacticians against a background of expectation of a unique, global and permanent coherence; if this background disappears –and this has been the case since the 1990s, with the abandonment of any claim to the elaboration of a new unique methodology– the same pluralistic practices no longer appear as eclectic, but as complex.

The authors of the *CEFR* recognize the practical eclecticism of teachers:

***At present, there is** no consensus based on strong enough research on this issue for the Framework itself to be based on any theory of learning. Some theorists argue that.... At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who believe that.... In between these two extremes, most "mainstream" students and teachers as well as instructional materials will follow more eclectic practices.* (pp. 108-109)

I underline: as we can see, these authors only admit the eclecticism of teachers insofar as they consider that research is not yet sufficiently advanced to impose the single method, which would be the "scientific" method. We find the same idea every time they have to admit a theoretical uncertainty (I underline):

- *It is also necessary that the description [of proficiency levels] be based on theories of language proficiency, although the theory and research **currently available** are inadequate to provide a basis.* (p. 23)

- *Recent work on universals has **not yet** produced results that can be directly used to facilitate language learning, teaching and assessment.* (p. 87)

- *In this sense, every language has an extremely complex grammar which cannot, **to date, be the** object of an exhaustive and definitive treatment.* (p. 89)

The authors state several times in their text that "the *Framework is not intended* to promote a particular teaching method but to present choices. "However, they adopt this position only because they are unable to impose their expertise on the basis of scientific certainties: not out of democratic principle, therefore, contrary to what they claim (cf. *above* at the end of Chapter 1, the quotation on p. 110 of this text), and even less because they are convinced that methods must be plural. They have in fact remained with a scientific conception of knowledge, which leads them to restrict the treatment of methodology, in the absence of certainties, to the simple compilation of the available options<sup>20</sup>, and thus to overlook the only relevant and complex reflection on the contextual rules for the use of each of the available methods, with their advantages, their limits and their possible drawbacks. The result is, as my colleague Jean-Jacques RICHER, a teacher of French as a foreign language, writes with a delicate use of euphemism, that "[...] methodological reflection [has been] somewhat anaesthetized by the massive diffusion of the *C.E.C.R.L.*, which is taken as a new "orthodidaxis"" (2008, p. 88)

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<sup>20</sup> Even though Germain Simons rightly points out that the authors of the *CEFR* have a "more or less precise" conception of learning, "that of learning by direct exposure to an *input* and/or by participation in acts of communication, a privileged conception which does not really go in the direction of the announced eclecticism. This privileged option is all the more formidable because it advances under the mask of an apparent openness to other options. » (2011, p. 20)

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## CONCLUSION

And indeed, as unlikely as it may seem, despite the explicit and repeated warnings of its authors, the *CEFR* has been used by some didacticists to explain to teachers how to "do class in FFL" or "teach languages with the *CEFR*" (partial title of two books published, one in 2010, the other in 2011). This would certainly have justified a nice public debate, where one would have logically expected the participation of the authors of the *CEFR*. But the first book only gave rise to an entirely positive review on the APLV website<sup>21</sup>, and I tried in vain to provoke the controversy with the very critical review I did of the second, which I entitled "Pour en finir avec le *CEFR*" ("To finish with the *CEFR*"), and in which I stated once again that "the confusions of this text [the *CEFR*] are structural and cannot be removed", and that "they now constitute a hindrance for didactic reflection and a brake on the evolution of the discipline." (PUREN 2012b, p. 2)

Anne FRIEDERIKE DELOUIS, in her report on the 2002 colloquium of German-speaking researchers on the *CEFR* (2008, cited *above* in note 7), notes that "the tone adopted by these researchers contrasts with that of most publications on the *CEFR* in French, written in the genre of popularization or in an apologetic mode with a few exceptions [...] and she then gives as an example of exception a lecture I gave in 2007 at the IUFM of Lorraine, which I entitled "Quelques questions impertinentes à propos d'un Cadre Européen Commun de Révérence" (PUREN 2007b, my emphasis on the "v" of "re~~v~~erence"). Such a reverence of most French didacticists towards this document, on which for years they have poured *ad nauseam* reverent glosses worthy of biblical exegesis, as well as the silence of almost all the others (including the authors of the *CEFR*), are cruel revelations and a damning historical testimony of the level of intellectual anemia to which the didactics of the FFL has fallen in France.

For more than ten years, I have been opposing the idea, defended by other EFL didacticists, that the actional perspective is an extension of the communicative approach: I have been arguing for ten years that it is in the interest of developing an action-oriented perspective that is opposed to the communicative approach, not in order to abandon the latter, but to enrich the plurality of methods available to teachers; <sup>22</sup>I have been waiting for ten years for colleagues to publicly discuss these issues and the concrete implementations of the action-oriented perspective that I have proposed, including in textbooks that I have edited. Would it be giving too much recognition and honor to an opponent to debate with him? Is adversarial debate too inconvenient and risky when one is used to simply communicating one's ideas in front of convinced, complacent or indifferent colleagues? Is it the concern for academic respectability that has caused so many EFL didacticists to lose interest in complex methodological questions –even though they correspond as much to the daily difficulties and concerns of teachers as to their sole margin of full pedagogical freedom and responsibility–, in order to devote themselves in droves to questions of sociolinguistics and linguistic policy, which are more prestigious, certainly, and more consensual when they are debated among colleagues sharing the same "dominant ideology" of plurilingualism<sup>23</sup>? Would it be too dangerous for one's career to dare to contradict the mandarins of EFL didactics, holders of access to promotions, publication spaces and well-paid expertise opportunities?

In a work entitled *Polémique en didactique: du nouveau en question* (1980a) published in a collection he was directing at the time, Robert GALISSON gave a completely different example, that of the promotion of the pluralism of ideas: he had welcomed, after a short chapter from his pen (pp. 8-20), a long text by Henri BESSE (pp. 30-136) where the latter systematically criticized R. Galisson's own position, which he in turn defended at great length in the following issue of the same collection (1980b). In the text of his first contribution, R. Galisson wrote:

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<sup>21</sup> See [www.aplv-languesmodernes.org/spip.php?article3491](http://www.aplv-languesmodernes.org/spip.php?article3491) (posted Nov. 16, 2010, last accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. PUREN 2014a.

<sup>23</sup> The expression –and the denunciation– are from Bruno MAURER, who published in 2011 a book entitled *Enseignement des langues et construction européenne. Le plurilinguisme, nouvelle idéologie dominante*". Cf. my online review: PUREN 2012a.

Christian PUREN, "Methodological reflection in the teaching of French as a foreign language since the publication of the *CEFR*, an anemic field in need of healthy polemics".

*Disdainful of the relativity of the things (... pedagogical, in particular), armed with ephemeral certainties, similar to the weathervane on top of the long bell tower, the theorists of the didactic become spend their time to smell the wind, to be the first to announce to the astonished crowds (?) in which direction it is going to blow. (1980a, p. 24)*

One would almost come to regret those days: then, at least, the wind was blowing on the didactics of FFL; then, at least, there was in methodology the old and the new that some criticized harshly, and others defended bitterly. We can only welcome the publication of issue 6/2014 of the *Cahiers du GEPE*, (GEPE 2014), even if it deals with another theme, that of "Language Policies in Europe. The question of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages": it brings together texts by one of the authors of the *CEFR*, Daniel COSTE (2014), critical or distanced articles by other authors on this document, as well as two reviews, one of Bruno MAURER's book (2011) and the other of an intervention by this author in a GEPE seminar. Unfortunately, one cannot speak of a contradictory debate in this issue of the journal any more than in the space on my website where I hosted the beginning of the polemic on French as a language of integration<sup>24</sup> in 2011, because these are juxtaposed texts. A real debate of this type, which should necessarily be done at least in part in the form of a public oral controversy, would be just as indispensable on the theme of "the Common European Framework of Reference and methodological reflection in the didactics of language-cultures: a work in progress": this is the title of an article that I published almost ten years ago, in 2006(b). But it seems that the whole didactics of the FFL in France has become too anemic to carry on and complete public controversies on any question, and that it can only generate latent dissensions or aborted debates. I still hope that a new generation of French FFL didacticians, undoubtedly united with young didacticians from other languages and other countries, will give back to this discipline the dynamism it once had, and which had given it a deserved international prestige.

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<sup>24</sup> See [www.christianpuren.com/fli/](http://www.christianpuren.com/fli/).

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