
The First Episode of Language Reform in Republican

Turkey: The Language Council from 1926 to 1931

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Following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the consolidation of the Kemalist regime in 1926, the President of the new republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk launched a reform process which aimed at changing Turkey's laws, administration, culture and, most significantly, its image. One facet of this process of transformation was the language reform that commenced with romanisation of the Turkish script in late 1928 and reached its zenith later on in the 1930s. Between 1932 and 1934, the *Türk Dil Kurumu* – the Turkish Language Institute, a radical reformist institution founded by Atatürk in 1932 – banished thousands of Arabic and Persian words from spoken and written Turkish and fabricated new, 'authentically' Turkish, words to replace them. The radical-reformist zeal subsided in 1935 as a result of the linguistic chaos of the previous years and came to a halt in 1936 with the proclamation of the so-called Sun-Language Theory. However, so much had changed during those few years and has done since, that even secondary school and university graduates in contemporary Turkey are not able to read and understand, for instance, Atatürk's famous *Speech* of 1926 from its original, and hence feel the need to consult 'modernised' or simplified versions. In this respect, the legacy of the language reform in early republican Turkey remains a matter of bitter controversy and pits the reformist Kemalists against an array of Islamists, conservatives and even liberals. The current debate on what proper Turkish is neatly overlaps with the major fault line that still divides Turkish society.

The alphabet and language reforms as well as the notorious Sun-Language Theory have already been subjected to concentrated and passionate, but by no means sufficient, academic scrutiny.¹ It is striking, on the other hand, that researchers in this field have so far overlooked

¹The main reference works on the Turkish alphabet reform are still those in Turkish. See, *Harf Devriminin 50. Yılı Sempozyumu* (Ankara, 1981); M. Şakir Ülkütaşır, *Atatürk ve Harf Devrimi* (Ankara, 1991); Bilâl Şimşir, *Türk Yazı Devrimi* (Ankara, 1992); Hüseyin Yorulmaz, ed. *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Alfabe Tartışmaları* (İstanbul, 1995); Nurettin Gülmez, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Harfler Üzerine Tartışmalar* (İstanbul, 2006). For a multi-faceted account of the language reform, one may consult Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Modern Turkey* (Jerusalem, 1954); Karl Steuerwald, *Untersuchungen zur türkischen Sprache der Gegenwart*, Vol.1, *Die türkische Sprachpolitik seit 1928* (Berlin-Schöneberg, 1963); Zeynep Korkmaz, *Türk Dilinin Tarihi Akışı İçinde Atatürk ve Dil Devrimi* (Ankara, 1963); Ağâh Sırrı Levend, *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri*, 3d ed. (Ankara, 1972); Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford and New York, 1999); Jens Peter Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache? Sprachwissenschaftliche Theorien in der Zeit des erwachenden türkischen Nationalismus* (Wiesbaden, 2000); Kâmile İmer, *Türkiye'de Dil Planlaması: Türk Dil Devrimi* (Ankara, 2001); Tuğrul Şavkay, *Dil Devrimi* (İstanbul, 2002); Hüseyin Sadoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları* (İstanbul, 2003). Studies on the Sun-Language Reform are relatively few; Erik J. Zürcher, 'La théorie du 'langage-soleil' et sa place dans la réforme de la langue turque', in *La linguistique fantastique*, ed. Sylvain Auroux (Paris, 1985), pp. 83–91; Geoffrey Lewis, 'Turkish Language Reform: The Episode of

the first institutionalised attempt at language reform in the early republican era. The lack of interest in the history and activities of the Language Council² from its foundation in 1926 to its demise in 1931 is largely due to the perception among contemporary observers as well as modern-day researchers that the Language Council was a failure and, thus, an unimportant episode in the course of Turkish language reform. Generally speaking, specialists on language reform in Turkey have chosen to focus on the 1930s, when the reform movement picked up pace and became one of the top items on the public agenda. Apart from the sensation that surrounded language reform in those years, another factor that has influenced this particular choice of focus on the 1930s is the availability of a larger body of sources from this period. Be they in the form of official publications of the Turkish Language Institute, memoirs of key participants in the reform movement or newspaper articles that reflected the public interest in linguistic questions, historians of the Turkish language reform after 1932 have a much broader range of sources at their disposal. On the other hand, the Language Council has attracted less scholarly attention as it was damned by both its public image as an abortive mission and the relative lack of source material. Its activities between 1929 and 1931, in particular, are little known. Scholarly indifference in this case has been undeserved and, since the discovery of the minutes of the Language Council's meetings and the emergence of other archival documents recently, it has become absolutely unjustified, too.

The aim of this article is, first to describe the political environment in which the Language Council was founded and to familiarise the reader with the Council's precise bureaucratic-administrative structure within the Ministry of Education. Second, the article will show how the Language Council was torn between its professional duties as a learned, semi-academic committee, on the one hand, and the politically motivated demands of the Turkish leadership, which expected to see quick results, on the other. Third, the article will also address the causes of failure and draw attention above all to the ideological split within the Language Council between its radical-purist and conservative members. Finally, the foundation processes of the Language Council and the Turkish Language Institute will be compared in order to see what kind of lessons Atatürk drew from that early rehearsal of language reform.

The Foundation and Early Activities of the Language Council

The language question had remained a staple of public debate in the Ottoman Empire from the mid-nineteenth century down to the very end. During the last two decades of the Empire, the focus of the debate shifted increasingly toward the need for simplification and, maybe,

the Sun-Language Theory', *Turkic Languages*, 1 (1997), pp. 25–40; Laut, *Das Türkische als Ursprache?*, pp. 94–161; Jens Peter Laut, 'Noch einmal zu Dr. Kvergić', *Turkic Languages*, 6 (2002), pp. 120–133; İlker Aytürk, 'Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40 (2004), pp. 1–25; Beşir Ayvazoğlu, 'Etimolojik Türkçülük: Türk Tarih Tezi ve Güneş-Dil Teoris'i'nin Ön Tarihi', *Muhafazakâr Düşünce*, No.5 (2005), pp. 29–42; İlker Aytürk, 'H. F. Kvergić and the Sun-Language Theory', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (forthcoming). This list is by no means an exhaustive one and includes only the essential reference works.

²There is a confusion regarding the Turkish name of the Language Council, since two appellations, *Dil Heyeti* and *Dil Encümeni* have been used interchangeably in the literature. I prefer to use the former for the reason that foundational documents, such as the statute of the Council, refer to it as the *Dil Heyeti*. The researcher, however, should be prepared to come across the term *Dil Encümeni* quite often in some other works on the Turkish language reform.

purification of Ottoman Turkish.³ It is possible to argue that the Ottoman intelligentsia was divided into three factions regarding the question of simplification and purification. The so-called linguistic Ottomanists (*Osmanlıcılar*), a category that usually overlapped with political Islamism in those days, were extremely conservative in taste and wanted to preserve the high Ottoman language with all its flowery Arabicisms and Persianisms. At the other extreme of the spectrum were the radical-purists (*taşfiyeciler*). These followers of the newly fashionable ethnic Turkish nationalism sought a thorough purge of all foreign words and grammatical rules from Turkish and suggested the adoption of language material from geographically and historically far-off Turkic communities to fill in the vacuum. In comparison to these two factions, whose adherents were few in number, the majority of the Ottoman intelligentsia had converted to Ziya Gökalp's language reform project in the last years of the Empire. Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) was arguably the most important ideologue of Turkish nationalism in the twentieth century. His definition of Turkish identity continued to influence all Turkish nationalists thereafter and his views on 'the New Turkish' were just as influential.⁴ Gökalp and his followers' reform plan required ridding Ottoman Turkish of foreign grammatical rules and seldom-used Arabic and Persian words, while they wanted to retain those foreignisms that they considered long turkified. For them, Ottoman Turkish was an imperial language. Not unlike the rulers of the Ottoman state in its heyday, the language of the sultans, according to this view, had 'conquered' innumerable foreign words, appropriating them over time as fair game. The Gökalpists recommended that these did not need to be singled out for clearance, on condition that they had become included in the spoken language of the masses.⁵

When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 on nationalist foundations, it inherited the language debate of the later years of its predecessor. Different proposals for language reform could be heard from among the ranks of the Kemalist leadership in Ankara even during the gloomy days of the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922). One thing was clear though: the Ottomanist view was by now becoming *passé*, its followers on their way to being effectively silenced by the fate of the Empire. There emerged a consensus on the necessity of some sort of language reform in the early years of the republic, but a new fault line was to appear soon. The new bone of contention would be the extent, depth and limits of language reform as well as the disagreement over the state's role in devising a master plan for the 'ideal' Turkish. Radical-purists and Gökalpists were going to engage one another in an all-out language war in every possible forum, including their benches at the Turkish Grand National Assembly (hereafter TGNA). In those debates lie the origins of the Language Council.

³A basic introduction to what Ottoman Turkish is can be found in, Fahir İz, 'Ottoman and Turkish', in *Essays on Islamic Civilization: Presented to Niyazi Berkes*, ed. Donald P. Little (Leiden, 1976), pp. 118–139; Engin Sezer, 'XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Dil, Bürokrasi ve Edebiyat İlişkisi Üzerine', *Yeni Türkiye Dergisi* (1999), pp. 483–493.

⁴See his poems "Kızılma", "Kendine Doğru", "Vatan", "Lisan", and "Sanat" in *Ziya Gökalp Külliyyatı I: Şiirler ve Halk Masalları*, ed. Fevziye Abdullah Tansel, 3d ed. (Ankara, 1989). Uriel Heyd provides an English summary of Gökalp's views on 'the new Turkish' in his book *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London, 1950), pp. 115–121.

⁵A concise summary of the views of those factions can be found in Halil Nimetullah, *Bugünkü Dilimiz* (İstanbul, 1930).

One such early debate took place at the TGNA on 1 September 1923. The occasion was provided by the MP Tunali Hilmi Bey, a radical-purist, who submitted a draft bill, the so-called Law on Turkish Language, on 23 August 1923 for the consideration of the relevant parliamentary committee. While we are not familiar with the content of the proposal, parliamentary records show that the draft bill was rejected by the committee on two very significant grounds. First, the committee argued, the draft bill was not at all compatible with the linguistic principles that reinforce the Turkish language, implying that it was far too radical for their taste. Second, the committee also contended that a law on language, involving many punitive measures for those who disobey it, would be at odds with the existing body of laws. When the grounds for rejection were announced by a secretary on behalf of the parliamentary committee, a sharp exchange took place between the radical-purist MPs, Tunali Hilmi Bey and Besim (Atalay)⁶ Bey, on the one hand, and others who opposed the draft bill. The latter pointed at the opinion of the committee, highlighting its importance in supporting their claim that the Turkish parliament was not a language academy and that it, therefore, could not and should not meddle in linguistic problems. The former, however, begged to differ. In their view, the Turkish people were used to adopting an innovation only when it was enforced by the government through legal means and, in the case of the reform of the Turkish language too, Besim Bey maintained that the state should not shrink from its responsibility. If the overwhelming opposition to the draft bill was to be taken as a measure of the parliament's reluctance in being a pioneer of language reform, then Besim Bey recommended that the MPs should at least delegate power to a "commission on Turkish Language" to be set up by themselves.⁷ In all probability, this was the first time that a suggestion was made for the establishment of an official agency to deal with the advancement of language reform in Turkey.

The suggestion of the radical-purists was shelved through the following few years of political turmoil, but it surfaced three years later during discussions on the foundational law of the Ministry of Education and its budget. When the Minister of Education, Mustafa Necati Bey, presented the draft bill to the parliament on 20 March 1926 on behalf of the government, the MPs turned their attention to Article 1, which laid the foundations of a Language Council (*Dil Heyeti*), and demanded a clarification on its duties.⁸ Mustafa Necati Bey ascended the rostrum once again and imparted the government's view on this issue. The Language Council was going to deal with the problem of orthographic reform of Turkish script first and foremost, he said, dropping the news that they were seriously considering adoption of the Roman alphabet. Besides, the Language Council would conduct research on Turkish language and prepare a comprehensive dictionary as well.⁹ Article 1 was then presented to the plenum with its content as follows:

A Language Council is hereby established as part of the Ministry of Education with the purpose of studying Turkish language and all kinds of scientific questions appertaining. The procedure

⁶The TGNA passed a so-called Surname Law in 1934, obliging all Turkish citizens to pick a family name. Most of these people mentioned here adopted their family names in 1934 and those are given in parantheses for identification purposes. No such identification can be provided for those who died before 1934.

⁷Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridesi (hereafter TZC), Devre:2, İçtima Senesi:1, İnikad:12, Cilt:1, 01.09.1339 [1923].

⁸TZC, Devre:2, İçtima Senesi:3, İnikad:74, Cilt:23, 20.03.1926.

⁹*Ibid.*

for the election of its members and its area of responsibility will be outlined in a statute to be prepared by the Council of Ministers.¹⁰

The article was put to vote and duly accepted by the parliament in the same meeting. By this act of the TGNA, the Language Council was finally born on paper.

A speech by the radical-purist, Besim Bey, which followed, however, reflected the confusion regarding the duties of the Language Council. Besim Bey referred to the Council as the 'Committee on the Unification of Language', on purpose it would seem, and expanded on this theme by complaining about minority languages in Turkey and inviting the government to ban the use of all languages other than Turkish. Furthermore, he added that he was going to keep a close watch on future members of the Language Council. Membership, he insisted, should be open only to those with "a particular view" on language reform. In fact, Besim Bey was so obviously suggesting granting membership only to radical-purists that, at the end of his speech, he felt compelled to say that he was not presenting himself as a candidate.¹¹ About a week later, a similar argument was voiced, this time by the MP Tunali Hilmi Bey. How could one expect the Language Council to have a progressive mentality, he asked, if the very law that established it contained many Arabic and Persian words? He also expressed his suspicion that appointees to the Council might well be selected from the recently demoted *ulama* class, thereby sealing the fate of Turkish for the worse forever.¹²

Although the TGNA authorised its establishment on 20 March 1926, appointment of the Language Council's members was delayed and the Council could not commence its activities for another year.¹³ The delay was first revealed in May 1926, when the government blamed fiscal constraints for removing the allowance for the Language Council from its 1926 budget.¹⁴ The decision of the government must have surprised MPs as well as the public. The Council's inauguration had been announced only two months earlier in March with a great fanfare. The fact that the cabinet was entrusted with the task of preparing the Council's statute and, in effect, appointing its first members indicated that the project was being taken quite seriously at the upper echelons of power in Ankara. Consolidation of the Kemalist regime and elimination of its political rivals in the trials of 1926¹⁵ raised expectations about the inauguration of a new series of path-breaking reforms in Turkey. One such reform project that attracted great attention at the time was romanisation of the Turkish script and the year 1926 saw the beginning of a pro-romanisation campaign in the Turkish press, which was undoubtedly encouraged by President Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk).¹⁶ It is very likely that the Language Council owed its premature launch to that revolutionary environment in the early 1926.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² TZC, Devre:2, İçtima Senesi:3, İnikad:79, Cilt:23, 29.03.1926. For another exchange on proper Turkish between Tunali Hilmi Bey and the Minister of Education, Mustafa Necati Bey, please see TZC, Devre:2, İçtima Senesi:3, İnikad:95, Cilt:25, 06.05.1926.

¹³ See reminiscences of Mehmet Emin Erişirgil, 'Bir Tarih, Bir Teklif', in *Atatürk ve Türk Dili: Belgeler*, ed. Zeynep Korkmaz (Ankara, 1992), p. 131.

¹⁴ TZC, Devre:2, İçtima Senesi:3, İnikad:100, Cilt:25, 16.05.1926.

¹⁵ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926* (Leiden, 1984).

¹⁶ Gülmez, *Tanzimat'tan*, pp. 197-198.

If this was indeed so, what accounts for the delay then? In other words, what happened during those two months from March to May 1926 that inspired the government to renege on its former decision? The surviving evidence does not allow for a conclusive judgment but in all likelihood it points at the role of the Prime Minister İsmet Paşa (İnönü) in arresting the course of events. Rumour had it at the time that İsmet Paşa might have exercised his well-known caution and, although he never spoke against the project in public, he talked the President out of an untimely romanisation attempt for fear that it would breed chaos in the bureaucracy and public life.¹⁷ İsmet Paşa did not have very fond memories of a former attempt at script reform, which he experienced as a high ranking officer in the Ottoman army. The so-called *Enverî* script,¹⁸ named after Enver Paşa, the strong-man of the Ottoman state from 1913 to 1918, was introduced shortly before the outbreak of World War One and remained in use into the first few months of the war, especially in military correspondence. It caused so much confusion, however, that the experiment was discontinued abruptly, leaving behind only a few, highly collectable military publications. It is very possible, indeed, that the Prime Minister İsmet Paşa managed to postpone alphabet reform in Turkey, by reminiscing on the fate of the *Enverî* script in late 1914.

Yet, even he could not halt the course of events forever. The pro-romanisation movement gathered momentum throughout the rest of 1926 and early 1927, finally moving the cabinet to discuss this issue. A government decree, dated 29 June 1927, endorsed a statute for the Language Council, prepared by the Ministry of Education.¹⁹ This was the first step in bringing the disused Language Council to life with the particular aim of romanising the Turkish script. After another brief pause, during which the Turkish parliament undertook an astonishing number of other reforms, the cabinet finally appointed a nine-member committee on 23 May 1928 to “study the method for adoption of Latin letters in [*Turkish*] and their applicability”.²⁰

The first nine members constituted an interesting team. Three of them, Falih Rıfki (Atay), Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu) and Ruşen Eşref (Ünaydın), were well-known authors and

¹⁷Metin Heper, *İsmet İnönü: The Making of a Turkish Statesman* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 56–89; Şimşir, *Türk Yazı Devrimi*, p. 83; Ahmet Cevat Emre, *İki Neslin Tarihi* (İstanbul, 1960), p. 327.

¹⁸The *Enverî* reform consisted of detaching the otherwise connectible letters of the Arabic alphabet from one another and inserting extra vowels between consonants, even where they are not needed according to the classical spelling system. This reform aimed at achieving a number of goals. Its first aim was to reduce the number of types required for printing. Since Arabic letters change shape according to their place in a word, the number of types for printing a text correctly in that alphabet exceeds several hundreds. Disconnecting the letters, however, fixed the number of necessary types at three dozens at most, saving a lot of time and energy for the typesetters. Second, the *Enverî* script was also supposed to standardise and simplify reading Ottoman texts by introduction of extra vowels. For more information see Gülmez, *Tanzimat'tan*, pp. 99–105, and Şimşir, *Türk Yazı Devrimi*, pp. 53–54. İsmet İnönü was a lieutenant-colonel in 1914; see *Türk İstiklâl Harbi'ne Katılan Tümen ve Daha Üst Kademelerdeki Komutanların Biyografileri* (Ankara, 1972), pp. 185–188.

¹⁹T. C. Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi, Bakanlar Kurulu Kararları (hereafter BCA–BKK) 030.18.01–025.39.18. The decree refers to the text of ‘the attached statute’, which contained principles for the appointment of the Language Council’s members, but as this attachment has vanished in the archive, we may consider the first statute of the Council lost in all likelihood.

²⁰BCA–BKK 030.18.01–029.32.20. The convoluted expression in the Turkish text sums up the task of the committee as ‘[]işanımızda Latin harflerinin sûret ve imkân-ı tatbikini düşünmek. . .’. The wording of the decree invites speculation in the sense that it was not at all clear whether this nine-member committee was identical with the Language Council. The decree authorised the establishment of ‘a council’, which would draw from the allowance in the budget earmarked for ‘the Language Council’. In a short while, however, everyone started to call this committee ‘the Language Council’ (*Dil Heyeti*).

journalists of the day and as well served as MPs for the districts of İstanbul, Mardin and Karahisar, respectively. The next three, Ragıp Hulusi (Özdem), Ahmet Cevat (Emre) and Fazıl Ahmet (Aykaç) were appointed to the Council in their capacity as experts in linguistics. A delicate balance of power was maintained within the Council with the inclusion of three civil servants, Mehmet Emin (Erişirgil), İhsan (Sungu) and İbrahim Grandi (Grantay), who presumably represented the interests of the Turkish bureaucracy and, hence, the vast majority of the literate public.²¹

From the very beginning, the Language Council was far from being an autonomous, scientific committee. When some members of the Council acted on the false premise that they alone would be responsible for the script reform project and started weighing the advantages of romanisation against its disadvantages, they soon came face to face with reality. Acting as the liaison between the President and the Language Council, Falih Rıfki reminded his colleagues of the limits of their powers and communicated the express orders of Mustafa Kemal to them: the political decision to romanise the Turkish script had already been made and it was not going to change as a result of scientific deliberations at the Language Council; the Council's task should, therefore, be limited to producing a romanised script for writing the Turkish language as quickly as possible.²² Obviously, the Language Council did not function as an independent committee or as a language academy, but it was an extension of the state apparatus from a legal-administrative point of view, taking orders from the top. The capitulation of what ought to have been an autonomous committee to the Ministry of Education and, indirectly, to the President would expose its activities to continuous prying and political intrusion from then onwards.

Members of the Language Council worked assiduously over the following few months and submitted a report to the President, most probably in August 1928, which outlined the principles of script change in Turkey. Upon receiving Mustafa Kemal's approval, the report was published in the same year together with school primers in the new alphabet.²³ The final step toward legalising the new alphabet was taken on 1 November 1928 at the TGNA, which unanimously passed the Law No.1353 on the Adoption and Application of the Turkish Letters following a speech by Mustafa Kemal. Being a textbook example of officially sanctioned linguistic prescriptivism, the law allowed a gradual transition to the new alphabet according to fixed deadlines and prohibited the use of Arabic characters after June 1930.²⁴ Both Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Paşa monitored the activities of the Language Council closely during this process and participated in several of its meetings.²⁵ The Council even moved from the capital Ankara to İstanbul, where Mustafa Kemal was spending the summer of 1928

²¹ Short biographical information about these members can be found in İbrahim Alâettin Gövsa, *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi* (n.p., n.d.). Two exceptions are Ahmet Cevat (Emre) and İbrahim Grandi. The former's autobiography, *İki Neslin Tarihi* (İstanbul, 1960) provides ample information about his life. Grandi, on the other hand, is a mysterious personality. The only thing we know about him is that he served as a diplomat in Turkish foreign service.

²² Baki Süha Ediboğlu, *Falih Rıfki Atay Konuşuyor* (Ankara, 1945), pp. 30–31.

²³ The author of the report was İbrahim Grandi [Grantay] and this was mentioned when the report was published; İbrahim Grandi (in the name of Dil Encümeni), *Elifba Raporu* (İstanbul, 1928). Other publications include, Dil Encümeni, *Yeni Türk Alfabesi: İmlâ Şekilleri* (İstanbul, 1928); Dil Encümeni, *İmlâ Lüğati* (İstanbul, 1928); Dil Encümeni, *Halk Dershanelerine Mahsus Türk Alfabesi* (İstanbul, 1928).

²⁴ Ülkütaşır, 59–128; Şimşir, pp. 157–245.

²⁵ Sami N. Özerdim, *Harf Devriminin Öyküsü* (Ankara, 1962), p. 13.

at the Dolmabahçe Palace.²⁶ Indeed, the Turkish government put all necessary resources at the disposal of the Language Council in order to speed up the romanisation process.²⁷

The Second Phase: Institutional Transformation

Having accomplished its first task, the Language Council was not dissolved. On the contrary, it soon became clear that the Council would be reoriented and change its focus so as to fulfil other missions. In October 1928, for example, Mustafa Necati Bey informed members of the press that his ministry was prepared to eradicate the influence of the Arabic and Persian cultures over the Turkish language. A special committee would be established, he said, for collecting words and expressions from Turkish dialects in Anatolia, which would then be reintroduced into written Turkish to replace remnants of Arabic and Persian. The inspiration for the creation of this committee, he did not forget to add, came from none other than Mustafa Kemal.²⁸ Apparently, the second stage of the Turkish language reform was about to begin.

No such committee, however, was founded in the following months. Instead, the Ministry of Education reorganised the Language Council, transforming its bureaucratic structure and charging it with a new set of tasks and responsibilities. A new statute containing these responsibilities and internal procedures was approved by the Council of Ministers and the President on 5 December 1928.²⁹ According to this important document, the Language Council (called *Dil Heyeti* and not *Dil Encümeni*) would be administrated by an executive Central Bureau (*Merkezî Büro*) with the possibility of having other, ordinary members (Article 2). The Central Bureau consisted of seven members who would be directly appointed by the Council of Ministers (Article 3). The ordinary members of the Language Council, in turn, would be appointed by the Minister of Education following nomination by the Chair of the Central Bureau (Article 6). Furthermore, the Minister of Education also had the right to dismiss members of the Central Bureau as well as the ordinary members as he saw fit (Article 7). Finally, the Chair of the Central Bureau was expected to prepare an activity report every three months and submit it to the Minister of Education.³⁰ In other words, the bureaucratic structure of the Language Council was designed in such a way that the Minister of Education could keep this institution under his thumb and steer its activities within the confines of the official language policy. Those procedural principles paved the way for permanent political pressure on the Council and manipulation of its decisions, thereby compromising the scientific character of language planning in early republican Turkey.

According to its new statute, the tasks of the Language Council were the following:

- 1 Preparing or commissioning a Teachers' Handbook of Turkish Grammar, on which school primers would then be based.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ The Turkish cabinet approved the creation of new bureaucratic positions at the Ministry of Education to be filled in by the Language Council members as well as endowing the Council with a permanent secretary; see BCA-BKK 030.18.01-029.36.6 and BCA-BKK 030.18.01-029.46.10.

²⁸ Özerdim, *Harf Devriminin Öyküsü*, p. 27.

²⁹ BCA-BKK 030.18.01-1.7.7 and its annex 18.147.2.1928.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

- 2 Preparing a comprehensive Turkish dictionary.
- 3 Publishing Turkish words that are used [*only*] in the vernacular or found in ancient texts in its bulletins and recommending their use.
- 4 Criticising language fads that are not consistent with the natural evolution of Turkish in these bulletins and ensuring the uniformity of spelling through further publications.
- 5 Providing information to the Ministry of Education on grammar and reading primers.
- 6 Making linguistic and philological research on the Turkish language and publishing their results.³¹

In sociolinguistic terms, the Language Council was expected to be in charge of corpus and status planning. On the one hand, it sought to develop the resources of Turkish by means of standardising its orthography and grammar, preparing a dictionary for the speech community and pursuing a policy of linguistic purism. On the other hand, these policies paved the way for the making of a particular dialect of Turkish “the official language” by designating it a prestige variety.³²

The Council of Ministers appointed the first members of the Central Bureau in December 1928 in the midst of transformation to the new alphabet and the appointment of a new group of eight “ordinary” members followed in February 1929.³³ In contrast to the Article 3, mentioned above, the Central Bureau consisted of only five members this time, including Mehmet Emin (Erişirgil), Ragıp Hulusi (Özdem), Ahmet Cevat (Emre), Avni (Başman) and Hasan Fehmi (Turgal), Mehmet Emin Bey being the Chair of the Central Bureau and, therefore, the Language Council. Ordinary members, on the other hand, grew in number from 1929 to 1930 and included İshak Refet (Işıtman), Ruşen Eşref (Ünaydın), Celal Sahir (Erozan), Fazıl Ahmet (Aykaç), Julius (Gyula) von Mészáros, Hamit Zübeyir (Koşay), Falih Rıfki (Atay), İsmail Hikmet (Ertaylan), İhsan (Sungu), İbrahim (Grantay), Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu), Velet Çelebi (İzbudak), İbrahim Necmi (Dilmen), Besim (Atalay) and Baha (Toven).³⁴ The composition of the Central Bureau suggested a change of blood when compared to the group who created the new alphabet. The core decision-making group within the Language Council was now made up of bureaucrats and language experts, while the former assemblage of authors, journalists and poets found themselves demoted to ordinary membership and reduced in importance. Why such a course of action was taken is not clear. One may only speculate that the aim of Atatürk and the Council of Ministers was to increase the scientific authority of the Council in the eyes of the domestic opponents of language reform and reinforce the imperative of *raison d'état* with the inclusion of language experts and bureaucrats. Those two goals were in fact incompatible: the Language Council could

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² R. L. Cooper, *Language Planning and Social Change* (New York, 1989).

³³ BCA-BKK 030.18.01-1.11.3 and BCA-BKK 030.18.01-2.15.11 and this last document's annex 18.147.9.1929.

³⁴ Similarly, most of the new members were well-known personalities in those days and their biographies are included in Gövsaş *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi*. Among those not included, Baha (Toven), or rather Mehmed Bahaeddin Toven, was a retired military officer, who composed one of the best Turkish dictionaries of the early republican era. A short biographical information is provided by Ali Birinci, in his introduction to Toven's dictionary's second edition; see Mehmed Bahaeddin, *Yeni Türkçe Lügat*, 2d ed (Ankara, 1997 [originally 1924]). Julius (Gyula) von Mészáros was a Hungarian Turcologist, who was employed by the Turkish government at the time as the co-director of the Ankara Ethnological Museum. Hasan Fehmi (Turgal), was a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education and served as the department chair for Turkish libraries between 1926 and 1939.

not possibly maintain high scientific standards if it were exposed to continuous political intrusion.

Troubles Within and Without

The meetings of the Language Council continued uninterruptedly despite the institutional transformation that the Council had undergone. Even before the approval of the new statute and the appointment of the members of the Central Bureau, the Council met in early December 1928³⁵ and made a crucial decision with far-reaching consequences. Responding to the demand for a comprehensive Turkish dictionary, originating from the Prime Minister İsmet Paşa, the Council resolved to translate the French *Le Petit Larousse* to Turkish.³⁶ The decision might strike one as very odd at first glance. The creation of a standard and authoritative dictionary is emblematic of all national revival movements and requires almost fanatical devotion on the part of lexicographers. Translating a French dictionary into a national language in order to fill in the gap, however, was unusual. In the Turkish case, it hinted at a newly found republican overconfidence, rooted in the belief that one could match every French entry in the Larousse with a Turkish one, proving the riches of the Turkish vocabulary thereby. At the same time, the Larousse project also reflected the age-old inclination of the Turkish intelligentsia to regard French as the most “civilised and beautiful” language. Arguably, the decision to produce a Turkish Larousse also revealed a tacit or subconscious recognition of the inadequacy of Turkish in comparison with French or other western languages in meeting the demand of the modern society for an ever-increasing number of scientific terms.

At its December meetings the Language Council assigned one group of Larousse entries to well-known contemporary Turkish authors and set scientific terms aside for passing over to university professors at the only Turkish university of the time, the İstanbul Darülfünun.³⁷ The Council held a special session to establish the principles to be observed by the professors in the making of discipline-specific terms and came to an agreement on adopting Latin terms. Separate proposals for giving priority to English, French or German terms over others, or yet another scheme for coining new terms from Arabic roots, were all turned down in favour of Latin.³⁸ There would be two very important exceptions to this principle though. The Language Council allowed the use of non-Latin terms (mainly Arabic, but some French, too), which had entered Turkish already and had come to be utilised by the public. In addition to this, the Council approved Hamit Zübeyr (Koşay)’s plan to invent Turkish equivalents for Latin terms, provided that such equivalents could be found.³⁹

³⁵The Language Council moved back to the capital Ankara after preparing the new alphabet. It held its meetings in a rented building in the newly established Yenışehir quarter. See Erişirgil, ‘Bir Tarih, Bir Teklif’, p. 137.

³⁶*Dil Encümeni Zabıt Defteri* (hereafter DEZD), unpublished manuscript at the Archive of the Türk Dil Kurumu, meeting on 1 December 1928. The DEZD contains the minutes of the Language Council and is an invaluable source of information. The first entry in the book is dated 9 Teşrinievvel 1928 and the first 14 entries were jotted down in the Arabic alphabet. As per the new law on romanisation, the entries shifted to Latin alphabet on 1 December 1928. The last entry, on the other hand, was penned on 20 November 1929.

³⁷The DEZD, meetings on 1 and 30 December 1928. At the latter meeting, the Central Bureau agreed to pay 5 Turkish *liras* per 25 entries.

³⁸The DEZD, meeting on 6 January 1929.

³⁹*Ibid.* Hamit Zübeyr (Koşay) would soon emerge as a member of the radical-purist clique within the Language Council.

When professors started to return these science terms in the following months, ostensibly ready for publication in the Turkish dictionary, the Language Council seems to have faced the first of many problems that it would confront. As the entries started to pile up by April 1929, members of the Language Council raised their voice against the Darülfünun. The Council expressed its dissatisfaction with the 'translation' of science terms and complained about the attitude of professors, each of whom employed a different method, flouting the principles conveyed to them.⁴⁰ In response, the Language Council decided to report this situation to İsmet Paşa.⁴¹ We do not know whether the Prime Minister intervened in this case or not, but the non-compliance of the professors should be noted as an unexpected phenomenon under what is generally referred to as an authoritarian regime. Even after the closure of the Darülfünun in 1932 and the establishment of the University of İstanbul in its stead, faculty members would continue to make efforts to safeguard their institutional and professional autonomy. In particular, they resisted political attempts to meddle in their language of instruction and treated with contempt non-academic outsiders who wanted to fix new scientific terms.⁴²

However, quarrels with professors paled in importance when compared to the problem of lack of direction and mixed signals coming from the political echelons. Indeed, political indecision regarding the future course and principles of the Turkish language reform ought to be seen as a major inconvenience that prevented the Language Council from a more effective performance until 1931. A remarkable example of the vacillation of Turkish politicians over language policy can be found in the records of the Language Council. The Prime Minister İsmet Paşa visited the Language Council on 17 February 1929 with a large delegation that included the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, department heads for primary and middle schools, the rector and deans of the İstanbul Darülfünun and professors of the Ankara Law School.⁴³ This delegation participated in what seemed to be a crucial meeting of the Language Council. İsmet Paşa's speech at the meeting was an important one both for its content and for the eccentricity of the language in which it was delivered. To begin with, the language of the speech was peppered with many neologisms, portending the 'revolutionised Turkish' of the years ahead, that is, from 1932 to 1935.⁴⁴ The language of the speech

⁴⁰The DEZD, meeting on 9 April 1929.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²İlker Aytürk, 'Politics and Language Reform in Turkey: The "Academy" Debate', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, forthcoming. One striking example is a report on scientific terms commissioned by the University of İstanbul in 1941 to a former member of the Language Council, Professor Ragıp Hulusi Özdem. The report amounted to nothing less than a systematic assessment of all aspects of language policy in Turkey with a critical eye, sparing not even the alphabet reform of 1928. At the end of his treatise, Özdem recommended, in barely circumspect language, the establishment of a new committee, composed of academics from the universities and members of the Türk Dil Kurumu, to determine the future direction of language policy in Turkey. The desire to bypass the Türk Dil Kurumu did not escape its members, who denounced the report in the harshest terms in their reply. See Ragıp Özdem, *Terimler Meselesi Münasebetile Dilimizin Islahı Üzerine Muhtıra* (İstanbul, 1941) and Türk Dil Kurumu, *Terimlerin Türkçeleştirilmesi Bakımından Profesör Doktor Ragıp Özdem'in Muhtırası Hakkında Rapor* (Ankara, 1941).

⁴³The DEZD, meeting on 17 February 1929.

⁴⁴The following quotations from the speech might give an idea about the peculiarity of its language to those who are able to read Turkish: 'Asıl değerli olan nokta, ekim yaşayışının bütün istelerini düzletip doyurmasıdır. Bunun içindir ki dil derneğimizin tutumu, pek doğru ve vuruşlu olarak, büyük bir erişkin dilin büyük bir sözcük kitabındaki bütün sözleri, diyelim ki, bütün anlatışları Türkçeye geçirmek tutamını bulmağa yönelmiştir. . . . Bu yaşayışla sakımlacak köşelere işaret koyduktan başka kitabımıza çabuk varlık verilmesindeki değimi kabarmı ile göstermiş

added force to its purist message: İsmet Paşa warned everybody against unwanted influences from both eastern and western languages. The Turkish language, he claimed, reminded him of an open field, free for trespassing. It was about time, he said, to build a fence around this field to protect the cattle inside (*Yüce toplanmamız dilimizin sürüsünü çizmek . . . için kurulmuştur*).⁴⁵ İsmet Paşa singled out the dictionary project as the most important assignment of the Language Council and identified the dictionary-in-the-making as the ‘fence’ around Turkish. He concluded his speech with a political directive to the Language Council: the dictionary had to be completed within a year hence at the latest.⁴⁶

The meeting and İsmet Paşa’s speech were reported in the Turkish press the following day.⁴⁷ Had we been reading that news item then, it could well have been assumed that the radical-purists had finally emerged victorious from their decade-old struggle against the Gökalpists and that a radical-purist reform process was about to begin as a natural corollary of the alphabet reform of the previous months. But this would have been a totally wrong impression. In fact, İsmet Paşa’s purist message was going to be invalidated within less than a month by a member of the Paşa’s own cabinet.

The cabinet member in question was the new Minister of Education, Vasıf Bey (Çınar), the political superior of the Language Council. Three weeks after the Prime Minister’s meeting with the Council members, on 5 March 1929, Vasıf Bey himself chaired a Council meeting and unravelled İsmet Paşa’s points one by one.⁴⁸ First of all, he distinguished between the flowery Ottoman language of the early twentieth century and the simplified Turkish of the late 1920s. Expression of sympathy for the latter meant obviously that Vasıf Bey did not feel the need for further purge of foreign words. “[O]ne cannot invent a language or words in this world”, he told the audience; “. . . it is not right to proceed from Arabic to the Chagatay language; as a matter of fact, the domination of Arabic [*over Turkish*] has come to an end; some words have been turkified; it is wrong to move toward Uzbek in order to get rid of those”.⁴⁹ In other words, the Minister of Education was explicitly challenging the radical-purist thesis that all foreign words in Turkish (including those that were considered turkified) needed to be replaced with authentic Turkish words to be found in Turkic dialects elsewhere, and if such could not be found, then new words had to be coined from purely Turkic roots. This was not all. Vasıf Bey also instructed the Council members to lay down all necessary principles for the lexicographic work before they would start the dictionary project. If this was going to take a lot of time, so be it, he said, since he expected them to work in a methodological fashion. The fact that they were in a rush did not justify departure from methodology, according to the Minister; on the contrary, the Language Council had to spend days and maybe weeks on a single word in order that fruits of its labour could be deemed scientific.⁵⁰ Due to those new instructions, the completion of the dictionary within a year, as İsmet Paşa had demanded a short while before, could not now have been expected;

oluyorum.’ *Ibid.* Anyone who is familiar with the Turkish prose of the late 1920s can tell how the language of the speech departed from the established canon.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ See, for example, the semi-official *Hâkimiyeti Milliye*, 18 February 1929.

⁴⁸ The DEZD, meeting on 5 March 1929.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

nor could one have imagined that the contents of the dictionary would remain the same. An explanation for this sudden reversal of language policy, however, cannot be found in the extant sources of data.⁵¹ It can only be surmised that language problems, naturally, did not rank high among the top priorities of the Turkish government, and that therefore they were dropped from the agenda whenever an impending political, economic or diplomatic emergency situation demanded the government's attention.⁵²

If the lack of an unambiguous official language policy hindered the activities of the Language Council, a similar problem also seems to have plagued the Council from within. Heated discussions between radical-purists (Gökalpists) and remaining Ottomanists (*Osmanlıcılar*), whose members were all present within the Language Council, were recorded in the minutes despite attempts at projecting an image of unity within the Council.⁵³ An early debate on procedure, for example, took place on the question of whether member articles that were at odds with one another could be published in the bulletin of the Language Council or not. The decision of the Central Bureau was positive; that is, conflicting views could be permitted in the bulletin on condition that the articles did not name names and harbour personal attacks.⁵⁴ Another case in point was the Minister Vasıf Bey's forewarning to the Council:

It has been brought to my attention by Emin Bey that there are conflicting trends within the Council. First of all, we need to resolve those conflicts once and for all. We cannot permit anarchy. It is a good idea to publish a bulletin in order to show the public what we are doing here; [but] mentioning those conflicts [*within the Council*] in the bulletin will damage the authority of the Council. The opponents [*of government's language policy*] will attack [*us*]. Allocate one week [*of labour*] to sorting out your principles. . . if this distinguished Council can agree on those, conflicts will not recur.⁵⁵

In response to the Minister, the Chair of the Central Bureau Mehmet Emin Bey replied that they had already discussed the issue of guiding principles several times:

There are not any important disagreements. Even the most radicals [*among us*] do not advocate inventing words. It is acceptable to furnish new words, as suggestions only, if a concept does not have an established [*Turkish*] equivalent and if an appropriate Arabic word has not been borrowed

⁵¹ Curiously, Vasıf Bey resigned on 7 April 1929. He had been appointed as Minister of Education only a month and a half before, on 27 February 1929. Whether this abrupt removal from power was related to Vasıf Bey's conduct at the Language Council meetings or not is unknown. See Utkan Kocatürk, *Atatürk ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tarihi Kronolojisi, 1918–1938* (Ankara, 1988), p. 488.

⁵² We have to remember that in this case the Great Depression of 1929 was just round the corner and that the European economies had already entered a phase of recession before the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929. It is no coincidence that the following series of reforms in Turkey were to start in 1932, that is, only after the shockwaves of the Great Depression stabilised and became manageable.

⁵³ It is not possible to tell who, among the members of the Language Council, belonged to which trend exactly. But roughly speaking, the bureaucrats supported the Gökalpist views, while some of the author/poets still clung to the Ottomanist position. As for the radical-purists, only Hamit Zübeyr (Koşay) and Besim (Atalay) can be safely included within this group. For some inconclusive observations, see Hamit Zübeyr Koşay, 'Atatürk ve Dilimiz', in *Atatürk ve Türk Dili* (Ankara, 1963), pp. 137–140.

⁵⁴ The DEZD, meeting on 15 January 1929. The two articles in question were those that belonged to Mészáros and Ahmet Cevat (Emre). Hamit Zübeyr (Koşay), however, disagreed with both! In any case, the bulletin was never published.

⁵⁵ The DEZD, meeting on 5 March 1929.

[for it]. . . There are not any members who suggest or desire borrowing words from the Azeri or Chagatay dialects. We are going to prepare the dictionary of the language spoken in Anatolia.⁵⁶

Notwithstanding the Chair's assurances, it was yet too early to consider the matter closed. During the following meeting that took place the next day, J. Mészáros, for example, encouraged the Council to permit scientists to coin 'discipline-specific' terms by combining existing Turkish roots and suffixes. According to him, this process, which was frowned upon as invention or fabrication among conservative Turks, was a natural method of expanding the vocabulary of any language.⁵⁷ Next Mehmet Emin Bey and Celal Sahir Bey registered their opposition to discarding turkified foreignisms and to coining 'pure' Turkish words in their places⁵⁸ and at that point, the Minister Vasıf Bey walked in one more time and asked if the Council had reached a consensus on the general principles that he had been talking about in the previous meeting. The following are the principles that were presented to the Minister and, since we do not come across any amendment to those later on in the minutes, we should regard them as the final word of the Language Council on the philosophy of language reform in Turkey:

- 1 We shall not walk in any direction other than the dialect of Anatolia.
- 2 We shall not coin words to replace [*foreign*] words that are widely used by the public.
- 3 [*Foreign*] words that are widely used and that have penetrated large segments of the speech community will be included in the dictionary.
- 4 If a concept does not exist in the [*Turkish*] language, then what we shall do is to create new words with suffixes by using Turkish roots to the greatest extent possible while paying attention to their suitability to public taste and use. This will be required [*only ?*] in the case of scientific terms.⁵⁹

As a consequence of this avowed Gökalpist turn in the Language Council, the purist spirit atrophied and faded away. It is very likely that the bureaucrat members of the Language Council, who were staunch Gökalpists, averted the purist tide either with great adroitness or thanks to a last minute intervention from the political echelons. All in all, the Language Council ceased to be an instrument of radical language reform from April 1929 to July 1931, when its activities were at last terminated by the TGNA.

Approaching the End

During those two remaining years most of the members of the Language Council busied themselves with the Larousse project: indeed, the minutes of its meetings were now completely impersonal and reduced to a few sentences, reporting the words that were discussed at each meeting without giving any further information. The preparation of the dictionary, however, continued unabated for this was now the only justification for the existence of the Council. The rest of the members, but above all Ragıp Hulusi (Özdem), Hamit Zübeyr (Koşay) and İshak Refet (Işıtman), took upon themselves the task of collecting unrecorded Turkish words from Anatolian vernaculars, which would eventually find their

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ The DEZD, meeting on 6 March 1929.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

way into the new Turkish dictionary.⁶⁰ All this lexicographical work required larger sums from public coffers to cover the costs of new offices, better infrastructure and more employees, driving the annual budget of the Language Council up to a record 40,000 Turkish *liras* for the year 1930.⁶¹ A year after the start of the dictionary project, though, the Council could not claim to have made progress in return for the public money that it had been spending since December 1928.

As expected, it was not long before this perception brought the Language Council under the spotlight once again. Its traditional detractors, the Ottomanist conservatives of all stripes, had been agitated since the alphabet reform and were dead set against any form of state intervention in their language. They kept silent for the most part,⁶² shell-shocked by the impact of the rapidity of the reforms of the previous years, but they were still a force with which to be reckoned. It was they who spread the gossip that the Language Council was nothing but a word-factory, churning out bizarre fabrications under the disguise of linguistic nationalism. We have seen that this gossip did not square with facts, given the Gökaltipist predisposition of the Council. Nevertheless, it had great propaganda potential especially among the opponents of the Kemalist regime.

What came as a surprise, however, was that some of the most vocal critics of the Language Council emerged from within the ruling party, the RPP. One of them seems to have been Yusuf Akçura, the powerful ideologue of Kemalist nationalism and deputy for İstanbul. He gave a long address to the parliament on the education policy of the regime during the debate on the budget of the Ministry of Education for 1930 and requested an explanation from the Minister, Cemal Hüsnü (Taray), about the activities of the Language Council. In overtly sarcastic language, Akçura asked if the Minister could show any tangible results of the Council's work, knowing well that there was none.⁶³ Not only did Akçura's comments at the TGNA expose the opposition brewing in Ankara against the Language Council, but it also demonstrated the risk involved in excessive government control over language policy. Akçura, and the Prime Minister İsmet Paşa before him, had had very unrealistic expectations when they demanded that the Language Council prepare a Turkish Larousse within a year or two. The impracticality of setting such a target was the gist of Cemal Hüsnü Bey's response to Akçura:

Our distinguished colleague is of course able to grasp, as much as I could, the complications one faces when a language is established, when a language is being put under control, [or] when a language that had never been under control is now being reorganised. We are facing serious difficulties and it has taken other [language] academies, which prepare the grand dictionaries that we utilise today, many years before they could overcome those [difficulties]. Our Language Council, too, has prepared the first part of the dictionary. Their efforts are truly worth praising.⁶⁴

⁶⁰This collection would later appear in two volumes; Hamit Zübeyr and İshak Refet, *Anadilden Derlemeler* (Ankara, 1932) and Hamit Koşay, *Anadilden Derlemeler II* (Ankara, 1952).

⁶¹The annex of the Decree of Council of Ministers No.8913, dated 1 March 1930, BCA-BKK 18.147.15.1930; and BCA-BKK 030.18.01-12.46.9 and its annex 18.147.17.1930; and see the budget of the Ministry of Education for 1930 in TZC, Devre:3, İçtima Senesi:3, Cilt:19.

⁶²A conspicuous exception was Ali Ekrem Bolayır's *Lisânumuz* (İstanbul, 1930).

⁶³TZC, Devre:3, İçtima Senesi:3, İnikad:60, Cilt:19, 18 May 1930.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

This example of in-house fighting over language policy may seem an unusual phenomenon at first, since Turkey experienced a single party system during the early republican period and the typical outcome of this kind of system is the fusion of the party and the state apparatuses. Hence, it is astonishing to see party members in this case heaping scorn on another state institution in public. Yet, we should take into consideration another feature of single party systems too. Because an opposition party is either not permitted in a single party system or does not stand a chance in elections, generally the opposition moves into the ruling party in the form of factions. These factions, then, vie for power or for winning the favour of the party leader and the top cadre. Probably, the exchange between Akçura and Cemal Hüsnü Bey at the TGNA was caused by this kind of factional dispute.

Things got even worse as another year passed without any substantial progress in the dictionary project. Opponents of the Language Council ridiculed its members openly in the Turkish press, arguing that if it took two years to finish entries for the letter A, then the dictionary would be completed in 50 years hence with the Council's slow pace.⁶⁵ It is around this time that Talât (Onay) Bey, the RPP deputy for Çankırı, began to lead the opposition.⁶⁶ He was reported to have published two spiteful articles in a local Çankırı newspaper, which condemned the Language Council in a ruthless manner.⁶⁷ It should be noted that it is quite difficult to construe the true meaning of the stupor of the government and the party, while Talât Bey, a member of the RPP group, took up arms against a government-backed institution and carried on a vilification campaign.

To pacify the growing opposition, it seems, the government slashed the Council's budget, reducing the annual total to 27,000 Turkish *liras* for the year 1931.⁶⁸ However, the budget discussions for the Ministry of Education, which always provided a forum for debate on the activities of the Language Council, witnessed a breach of party discipline in 1931. Interpreting the silence of the government and the party as approval, opponents of the Council rose up under the leadership of Talât Bey. He shot the opening salvo by demanding an explanation on the criteria of election to the Council.⁶⁹ Dismissing the Minister Esat (Çınar)'s account,⁷⁰ Talât Bey expressed his resentment and spelled out three major criticisms. First of all, the Language Council did not have the potential for success, according to him, in view of the fact that its members were elected through favouritism rather than on the basis of their scientific

⁶⁵Falih Rıfki [Atay], 'Türk Lûgati', *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 22 June 1930, p. 1. Falih Rıfki was forced to devote his editorial column in the semi-official Ankara newspaper, *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, to the defence of the Language Council. He basically argued that the completion of the entries to the end of the letter A should be considered as a success, as this proved that the Council had determined the lexicographical principles of the Turkish dictionary. Completing the rest of the dictionary was not going to take more than two years, according to him, since the Council could now give its attention to the lexicographical material. When he wrote this piece, Falih Rıfki was nominally still a member of the Language Council, although he stopped attending its meetings since 21 April 1929.

⁶⁶Ahmet Talât Onay (1885–1956) was an accomplished poet and an amateur but respected researcher on Turkish folk literature. During his teaching career at Ottoman *lyées* before and during the World War I, he had a reputation for being a courageous Turkish nationalist. For more information, see Cemal Kurnaz, *Ahmet Talât Onay* (Ankara, 1990).

⁶⁷Those articles are said to have been published in the Çankırı newspaper, *Duygu*. I have not been able to locate a copy of this newspaper in major Turkish libraries. We are informed of their existence by İshak Refet [İşitman]'s reply to Talat Bey; see İshak Rafet [sic], *Dil Kavgası: Çankırı Mebusu Talât Beye Cevaplanım* (Ankara, 1931).

⁶⁸TZC, Devre:4, İçtima Senesi:1, İnikad:29, Cilt:3, 16 July 1931.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

credentials.⁷¹ Even the few exceptions among them were paralysed within a dysfunctional system. Therefore, Council members were appropriating the work of others before them in order to cover up their lack of expertise. Secondly, Talât Bey reiterated the gossip that the Council fabricated words and was going to include these neologisms in its dictionary. Third, he underlined how the Council had been wasting public resources since the end of 1928. 90,000 Turkish *liras* had been spent on procuring a short section of the dictionary and a few hundred science terms and this was too high a price, he said, for the work of incompetent people.⁷² Talât Bey finished his speech by calling for a vote on his motion to nix the proposed budget of the Language Council altogether, allocating a mere 10 *liras* to keep that budget item on the books until “a superior scientific committee is assembled in the future”.⁷³ The motion was then put to vote and, in open defiance of Minister Esat Bey’s plea for endorsing the proposed 27,000 *liras*, the MPs terminated financial support to the Language Council.⁷⁴ That was indeed a decisive moment. With its subvention gone and having no recourse to any other means, the Language Council had to stop its activities and disband.

The government had not expected this to happen. Only a few days before that crucial vote in the parliament, the Council of Ministers had approved a plan for creating new positions in the Language Council and determined their respective salaries.⁷⁵ In the same vein, Falih Rıfki Bey, who was known to communicate the views of the President Mustafa Kemal in his editorial column in *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, protested at the decision of the parliament.⁷⁶ Obviously, the rebellion of the RPP deputies against the language policy of the government did not go down well with the President, who did not hide his sympathy for the radical-purist thesis. Falih Rıfki Bey accused demagogues in the parliament (read Talât Bey) of squandering public money spent on a vital project; he believed that opposition to the Language Council had its roots in the jealousy of those who could not become its members and in the anger of the conservatives who resisted the purification of the Turkish language from the very beginning.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the government did not seem to have been greatly disturbed by its defeat at the TGNA. After all the dust had settled, a minor level public servant was appointed to store up the correspondence and documents of the Language Council.⁷⁸ It is possible to conjecture at this point that Mustafa Kemal himself did not agree with the Gökalpist attitude of the Council and that he was not pleased with the pace of language reform, too. If he had already decided to establish a fundamentally new institution to carry out a more ambitious reform of the Turkish language, then we may understand why the government did not do

⁷¹ It is not possible to confirm the accusation of favouritism, but Talât Bey was certainly right when he claimed that the vast majority of the Council members lacked any form of expertise in the field of linguistics and lexicography.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ File of correspondence between the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Finance, BCA-BKK 18.147.18.1931; and Council of Ministers Decree, dated 12 July 1931, BCA-BKK 030.18.01-21.50.19.

⁷⁶ Falih Rıfki, ‘Kusur Kimin?’, *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 19 July, 1931, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* It should be noted that Talât Bey’s troublemaking behaviour at the TGNA did not harm his career; and he continued to serve in the parliament until 1946.

⁷⁸ Council of Ministers Decree, dated 17 August 1931, BCA-BKK 030.18.01-22.60.6.

much to come to the rescue of the Language Council. In any case, the first episode of the Turkish language reform in the early republican era came to an end with the decision of the Turkish parliament in July 1931.

Conclusion

It is possible to draw two sets of conclusions from the story of this failure, one concerning the future trajectory of language reform in Turkey, the other addressing the broader theme of the nature of Kemalist regime.

To begin with, the Language Council experiment from 1926 to 1931 demonstrated the lack of an official language policy in the first years of the early republican period. Nominally, the Kemalist regime supported a nationalist approach to language planning, but in practice there was no effort to clarify what a nationalist approach exactly meant. Should the leadership have embarked on a radical-purist purge of Turkish with the final aim being a scrupulously purified language; or did it make more sense to give in to the Gökalpist position, which had already become the view of the majority by the 1920s? Both options were actually distinct shades of an essentially nationalistic worldview. The resulting ambiguity in the Kemalist cultural policy in the early years was reflected in the policy of language reform and could not be resolved until 1932, when Atatürk finally opted for the radical-purist thesis. Secondly, the experience of the Language Council also showed the limits of language reform when it was undertaken by the Ministry of Education. The dominance of the Gökalpist bureaucrats over the Ministry made it difficult to implement the radical-purist reform as long as these bureaucrats were the ones who controlled its pace and scope. It is no coincidence that radical-purism could be pursued vigorously only after 1932, when Atatürk adopted language reform as his pet project and started to supervise the process personally.

Thirdly, the failure of the Language Council drew attention to the risks involved in linking the agency for language reform directly to the Turkish state by making it a state department. Association with the state diminished the scholarly and intellectual prestige of the Language Council, prompting opponents of Atatürk and the RPP to regard language reform as overly politicised. Moreover, in case of failure, the government could not absolve itself from criticism and an unnecessary embarrassment. In view of these considerations, the Turkish Language Institute (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) was established as a private society in 1932 with a procedural separation from the state. Its members were not considered civil servants, nor did they receive their salaries from the public budget. As a private society according to Turkish law, its members were selected internally. Leaving those procedures aside, however, there was no hiding the factor of the influence of the state over the activities of the Institute. A private society, whose founder was the powerful president of the country, could not have escaped the orbit of the government. All members of its central committee were, in practice, handpicked by Atatürk, the majority of them being MPs from the RPP ticket. The personnel of the institute and members of the central committee were paid out of the Institute's budget, but it was well known that the Turkish state was the only contributor to that budget in the form of donations. Even so, it is possible to conclude that the Institute had an indirect relationship with state authorities and, compared to the Language Council, this can be considered a step forward toward institutional autonomy. It

is likely that the new organisational set-up resulted from the experience of past mistakes. On the one hand, Atatürk probably wanted to bestow the status of a scholarly academy on the Turkish Language Institute, and to increase, thereby, its prestige in the eyes of domestic opponents and the international academic community. On the other hand, Atatürk might also have planned to deflect criticisms away from the state in case the experiment would fail as its predecessor did. With the new arrangement, the government kept the Institute at arm's length, which allowed enough room for both controlling the Institute and disowning its activities if the need arose.⁷⁹

Finally, the way in which the Language Council collapsed sheds light on the nature of the Kemalist regime in those years. The prevalent image of the regime during Atatürk's lifetime is that of an authoritarian government, maintaining full control over Turkey through the extensive structure of the single party system. The RPP, in turn, is usually described as a cadre party that imposed a hierarchical order on its members on the basis of the acceptance of strict ideological supervision. This portrait, however, is not consistent with the events that led to the demise of the Language Council. A faction of MPs from within the RPP rebelled against their own government in 1931, challenged its budget and prevented allocation of public funds to the advancement of the official language policy. This was not the typical authoritarian regime which was so common in Central and Eastern Europe during the interwar period. The RPP leadership was certainly interested in maintaining full control over the voting behaviour of all party-affiliated MPs and at the same time expected from them unwavering allegiance to the Kemalist reform policy, however defined according to the exigencies of the moment. Yet, the research for this article shows that the top leaders were able to achieve neither in this case. The fate of the Language Council, therefore, should lead us to re-consider some of clichés regarding the early republican Turkey and its regime.

⁷⁹ Aytürk, 'Politics and Language Reform in Turkey', (*forthcoming*).