

# Linguistic Imperialism or Cultural Diplomacy? British Council and The People's Houses in Early Republican Turkey\*

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## Abstract

In this study, the language courses started in the People's Houses at the beginning of 1940s by British Council of which presence has been subject to various speculations in Turkey are examined within the scope of language imperialism and cultural propaganda. In addition, in this period of World War II, the fact of propaganda which is an effective means of struggle by European great powers is also one of the concepts used to examine the activities of British Council in Turkey. British cultural propaganda, which started with the principle of turning English into a world language, was transformed into a systematic activity after the establishment of the British Council and during World War II, it was seen as the instrument of political struggle by using against the spread of the Axis states in the cultural sphere. While the British Council's language courses in People's Houses are seen as part of cultural propaganda for the British, the political elites of Turkey in that period saw the British Council's activities as a driving force in its Westernization / modernization adventure.

## Keywords

Turkey, British Council, people's houses, language imperialism, cultural propaganda.

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## Introduction

1930s are quite critical periods in terms of placing the reforms put on the fast track after the War of Independence in Turkey and expanding them to the base. The constitutional arrangements in this period aimed to give direction to the functioning of the state in line with the Kemalist principles, and on the other hand, actions were taken to shape the political identity of the Republican People's Party (RPP)<sup>1</sup>, which holds the country's administration (Uzun 2010: 239-240). It should be underlined that this period was the scene of deep psychological and political swings, which were determined by the destruction caused by the economic crisis that began first in the US and subsequently influenced the whole of Europe. In addition, militarism and nationalism, supposedly completely eradicated by the First World War, have reactivated all over Europe (Lee 2014: 220). When looked at the projection of the environment in Turkey which will move to power of the totalitarian regimes in Europe, in the 1935 Congress of the RPP, the general secretary of the party being combined with the ministry of internal affairs, Recep Peker's appointment from the fanatic part in the party and also provincial governors taking over the task as the party's head of the provincial organizations are the first noticeable applications. In this process, it is a fact that the totalitarian political practices, which have influenced the world politics and found opportunities every day to strengthen its power, have the potential of creating political drift in Turkey. The notions such as Fascism and National Socialism were observed with sympathy by some intellectuals standing close to the ruling elite in Turkey. Falih Rıfki Atay's lines that "democracy and liberalism have been defeated by reality a thousand times" gives an idea in this subject (Bora 2017: 140). However, Atatürk's stance on this issue would determine the course of the political climate in Turkey, rather than confusion dominated the period had been in the direction of competitive democracy. As evidenced by the experience of the Free Republican Party, total and monistic character of the 1930s failed to find root in Turkey.

In short, the danger of fascism in the interwar period in Europe assigned responsibility to the administrators of Republic of Turkey to control the society and educate them in accordance with the principles of the Republic. In addition, within the motives moving the state officials in this regard, there was also the aim of avoiding from engaging in different currents or preventing

the formation of social classes that would endanger the Republic and its revolutions (Çeçen 1990). Apart from these changes, which constitute the institutional structure of the RPP, a similar picture emerges in determining the relations between the state and society. For the purpose of the single-party administration's keeping all social layers under the control, institutions such as Teachers Union, Turkish Hearths, Mason Chambers, Child Protection Agency, Red Crescent and Turkish Aeronautical Association, which are a vital element of political-social life, were closed and taken under the control of RPP (Ertan 1994: 9-14). The truth is that along with the Free Republican Party experience's ending up with the failure which was of the political developments in Turkey in the early 1930s and a broad social base's developing a political attitude in favor of the opposition concerned the Republican dignitaries. The fear that these social and political conditions in the country could endanger the new regime aimed to be established in line with Kemalist principles started the process leading to the establishment of the People's Houses. At this point, it can be concluded that the impressions that Atatürk had made during his trip to Turkey in 1930 had resulted in some radical decisions (Doğaner 2002: 78). The desire to eliminate the distance between the intellectuals and the people, which is another drawback of the mentioned period, by taking some measures to bring these two classes together, was tried to be realized by the establishment of the People's Houses. According to Karaömerlioğlu, with the concern of expanding the mass base of the ruling elites, the People's Houses were designed as an institution in which, if not practically but theoretically, the populist ideology would be discussed and help the intellectuals go to the public (Karaömerlioğlu 2006: 48). The People's House, which is a result of the single-party CHP's quest to reach out to the masses with the Village Institutes, which will be on the agenda in the following periods, which aims to realize a wide range of purposes. Speaking at the opening of the Ankara People's House, RPP Secretary General Recep Peker summarized the aim of the establishment of the People's Houses as: "To organize mass of people with the national conscious who understand each other, love each other and are connected to the same idea" (Özacun 1996: 78). Almost all of the researches which include 1930s and 1940s Turkey and also the establishment of the People's Houses unite at certain points by putting forward similar themes. People's Houses, which are defined as political and cultural centers in which large

masses are endocrined on the basis of the ideals of secularism and populism (Karpaz 1974: 69), are also regarded as institutions in which the habits of the new life required by Kemalism, which is a modern project, necessities of behavior and thinking, art and music tastes, entertainment forms or in short, a new “attitude of mind” will be adopted in society (Yeşilkaya 2003: 61). Considering the evaluations made on a very wide scale, it can be concluded that the People’s Houses are a project for the realization of various aims in political, ideological, administrative and social fields. When the political structure of the period was evaluated, People’s Houses were put under critical tasks in the context of the dissolution of the single party RPP in the state mechanism and efforts to develop an organic relationship between the state and society. In addition to the implementation of the history and language theses of the single-party administration through the People’s Houses and People’s Halls (Aydın 1996) the practices, in which united and classless society imagination would be accomplished, such as public relations, social organization, social, educational and cultural group activities are in line with the principle of populism are among the important functions of the People’s Houses (Olgun 2013, Yeşilkaya 2003: 60).

The People’s Houses were have been established for the political elite in Turkey in the interwar period to indoctrinate the society in line with Kemalist ideology and in one sense, they have been used as a means of political communication. It can be said that within the prominent institutions of which the states compete across Europe to ensure superiority in political, economic and cultural fields in terms of propaganda and cultural diplomacy, Public Orators’ Institution of the Republican People’s Party (CHP Halk Hatıpları Teşkilatı) and the People’s Houses equal in Turkey. The Turkish Revolution, which was characterized by the realization of the nation-state project, was not only to break with the Ottoman past in many ways, but also differed from the totalitarian regimes that had influenced Europe. In this regard, in order to root the revolution, emphasis was given to propaganda on public education and the policies to be applied on it (Uzun 2010). However, the propaganda methods used by the European states were targeting the people of the competing states, the aim of the People’s Houses in Turkey was the Turkish society again. This situation can majorly be explained that Turkey belonged to the anti-revisionist group within the states that divided into revisionist and anti-revisionist before the

World War II and by the lack of ambitions of the statesmen of the period to export Kemalist thought to other states. On the other hand, the education phenomenon, which was seen as a tool of political socialization in the early Republican era, became one of the important channels in the realization of the cultural development target in line with the utopia of humanism which was in the center of the Deputy Minister of Education Hasan Ali Yücel in the 1940s. In the intellectual environment where westernist/humanist understanding marked the 1940s of Turkey, education which is an important pillar of total development, has been shaped in this direction. In this understanding of education, where translation activities come to the forefront, the desire to open up to the world and the dominance of Western values in social life stands out as one of the main objectives (Müftüođlu ve Sabuncu 1993). On the other hand, one of the basic character elements of the educational understanding of the 1940s is the efforts against dangerous ideologies such as racism, expansionist nationalism and National Socialism. The struggle in this field through educational staff and official periodicals reflect the cultural environment of the 1940s. In the last analysis, Hasan Ali Yücel's heading educational organization in the mentioned period, aims to combat the dangerous ideologies of the years of war which contradicts with the Republican utopia and on the one hand, to prepare the ground for the post-war political liberalization thanks to the cultural humanism and qualified educational equipment aimed at rooting the society in general (Salmoni 2004: 100).

In this study, by mentioning the propaganda methods used intensively in the interwar period, the issue of propaganda, which is almost ignored by the extensive literature on the People's Houses, is discussed. A competent research on the relationship between the People's Houses and British Council belongs to Eminalp Malkoç (Malkoç 2009). The mentioned article prepared from the archives in Turkey, needs to be completed at the point of reflecting the British point of view although it can answer many questions on the subject. In this study which is written with this concern, language courses and other diplomatic activities of the UK, which is in a position of friendly and allied country in the Turkey's foreign policy in the mentioned period, started in the People's Houses through the British Council will be assessed on the basis of the British Council correspondence. The correspondence in the file of the People's Houses in the British Council catalog in the British

National Archives also sheds light on the process of the evolution of the Anglo-Turkish relationship, which was founded in 1939, into military and diplomatic partnership during World War II.

### **The Path to World War II: From Propaganda to Cultural Diplomacy**

Since the agreements signed with the defeated states after the World War I were far from creating a fair order, the establishment of the peace situation in Europe became more difficult and thus the road to a new war was paved. In these years called as the interwar period, the competition between the revisionist states such as Germany and Italy and the status quo states that had an appeasement policy against them started the propaganda struggle around the world (Özal 2019). Although it can be defined in various ways; all activities aimed at influencing society in order to adopt values belonging to a group or person can be considered within the scope of propaganda. What is important at this point is that the source of this effect is not known by the society. According to this definition, the source of propaganda under the influence of society is not known and its purpose should be hidden (Timasheff 1943: 10). As can be predicted from the propagation activities to persuade a social mass to remain indecisive on a political issue in terms of adopting certain principles, can be a method that states can use for their own citizens as well as targeting neighboring countries, hostile countries or country communities aiming to expand their influence area (Timasheff 1943: 10). The propaganda activities initiated by the totalitarian regimes, which became widespread in Europe especially during the interwar period, both for obtaining and retaining power, included highly professional methods (Herma 1943: 202). On the other hand, in the process of World War II, the states of the Axis Powers carried out the propaganda of the fascist regime intensively in the countries they aimed to influence (Baldinetti 2011). In Europe, including to opposite polarities, one of the country reflected an intensive propaganda struggle seen in interstate is Turkey. Germany and Britain, and notably the USA have carried out propaganda activities targeted at community and political decision-makers in Turkey. The quite remarkable point of a memorandum, which is related to the propaganda activities to be carried out in Turkey, presented to Laurence A. Steinhardt who had been in Turkey between the dates of March 10, 1942 and August 20, 1945 as the American Ambassador is that the People's Houses are designated as

propaganda centers. According to the memorandum, it is planned that the Turkish people, whose views on American life are based solely on the films they see, are influenced by conferences about American life (Bali 2007: 75). When looked at the German propaganda activities in Turkey, they seem to try to develop contacts with people who are usually trained in Germany or influential within the government and in schools, in engineering, railways, mining and industrial areas. On the other hand, Ankara People's House being one of the places where the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra gave a concert in Ankara on 28-31 March 1942 proves that the People's Houses are one of the important centers of propaganda activities during the period examined (Seydi 2006: 66). Essentially, it will not be right to separate the propaganda activities intensified during the World War II from the phenomenon of cultural diplomacy. Although the concept of cultural diplomacy has entered the world political literature since the 19th century, it is known that France and Italy are the leading countries. As a result of the studies carried out in the fields of cultural diplomacy, education and culture, such activities based on the influence of a foreign country by influencing the citizens of a foreign country are mainly aimed at achieving political and economic gains (Ryniejska 2009). Founded in 1883, the *Alliance Française* is committed to spreading French culture in the Middle East and North Africa, the center of world politics (Leeper 1935: 204). As we have seen, the French made systematic attempts to spread their language and culture a generation ago before World War II. In Italy, the *Dante Alighieri Society*, which was established in the middle of the century for this purpose, was allocated 0.3% of the total budget and *Kokusai Bunkwa Shinko Kwai*, which was established in Japan in 1934, was a product of politics aimed at strengthening international cultural relations (Taylor 1981: 159).

The United Kingdom, on the other hand, took action by taking steps in response to the moves of the rivals in the global politics regarding cultural diplomacy. Established in 1934, the British Council is an organization that considers language teaching as a basic tool for the elimination of anti-British propaganda in overseas countries and obtaining and spreading the right information (Taylor 1981: 125). Edward VIII, Prince of Wales, who expressed his views on the founding of the Council, stated that it should be focused on language teaching. He also stressed that it is possible to make efforts to ensure that British literature and culture have the largest fan base

in the world, and that this is possible through the expansion of the English language (Donaldson 1984). Anthony D. Parsons, an experienced British diplomat who has served in nine different countries since World War I, stated that he had met anti-Western statesmen and businessmen in his countries and expressed his thoughts; “Their stiffness has changed when reading a book from the British Council library, or watching the performance of a mobile company performing Hamlet, or after the education of their children at the British Council language course” (Parsons 1985: 8). In this context, the British statesmen who set goals such as increasing national prestige and the level of human development in the international sense have assigned the British Council tasks to introduce British culture in foreign countries, to expand the spread of English language and to establish close cultural relations with third countries (Gillan 1952: 30).

It is a fact that during the interwar period, European states intensely turned to cultural diplomacy in their colonies and in the regions they wanted to include in their sphere of influence. Cultural diplomacy has become the most important competitive tool in the global political arena where cultural identities and belonging are competing rather than ideologies (Finn 2003: 15). Under these conditions, the British Council has implemented diplomacy to make the British lifestyle and language more recognizable, the exchange of knowledge and thought with foreign people, the teaching and use of English in foreign countries, royal land and colonies, equipping overseas schools, opening libraries, to provide internship or education in industrial fields in England, to move people closer to the ideals and styles of British education, industry and administration in foreign countries, to make use of the resources allocated to science and technology by England, to benefit from the resources allocated to science and technology, to make them witness dance, fine arts, drama and music (Taylor 1981: 169). Right at the beginning of World War II, the British Council intensified its activities in countries such as Italy, South America, Portugal, Turkey, Egypt, Palestine and Iran. It was argued that the aim was not only to assert that Britain as the representative of advanced democracy, but also to show the foreign public that Britain could not decline with empty propaganda (Taylor 1981: 274). When the war broke out, the Balkans, the Middle East and the Mediterranean countries constituted the focus of the British Council's activities. In these regions where German and Italian propaganda



is widespread, the British Council aims to make British politics dominant (Adam 1949: 368). When Anthony Eden was Secretary of State, the British Council first began operations in the Foreign Office in 1934 as a politically controllable device to influence neutral states in order to bring Britain to the line during the war (Atherton 1994: 29).

### **From Cultural Diplomacy to Linguistic Imperialism: British Council's Activities in The People's Houses**

During the interwar period, the British Council concentrated on its activities in the Middle East countries and diversified its propaganda tools. Action was taken to support scouting movements, to establish girls' schools and to support Catholic missionaries. In a sense, these activities, which aim to add value to British cultural elements on a global scale against French and German cultural expansion, led the British Council to specialize in some areas (Shakespeare 2013: 12). According to this view; English should be made "lingua franca" of Europe and the world because in a world where common language is spoken, sharing will also increase. However, in any case, as a result of Britain's expansion of its influence area with cultural expansion in the world, an intensive work has been undertaken to promote English language (Peter 2006: 127). At this point, we encounter the concept of linguistic imperialism within the scope of radical criticism movements of the 1960s. Although various definitions of this concept have been put forward, the definitions often evoke objectionable meanings. Linguistic imperialism is a European-centered term. It means imposing cultural elements, institutions, lifestyles and ideologies to the communities under the sovereign states and always putting this relationship in a rational form in favor of the dominant nation. In this case, linguistic imperialism makes sense in that the languages spoken by the tribes-communities are reduced to dialect level and replaced by imperial languages. The question that needs to be asked is what distinguishes dialect from language. Language is a dialect that has been politically successful and accepted. Therefore, there is a complete consensus that languages that cannot prove their political existence will remain dialectical (Phillipson 2008: 26). According to Phillipson; linguistic imperialism also requires an imperial perspective to some extent. This also carries racist elements. As Earl Gray quoted in 1899: "An Englishman is right to think that his view of the world and life is better than a Maori or

Hottentot. And no one can resist Britain's imposition of a better and higher perspective on savage societies. Is there any objection that the white man would and should impose his advanced civilization on the colorful peoples!" (Phillipson 2008: 29)<sup>1</sup> It can be said that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is a key concept for those who emphasize the imperial aspect of global English (Peter 2006). Because, the fervent British imperialists believed that English was an important instrument for transforming colonies (Boyle 1997: 172).

The United States and Britain have made efforts to turn English into a global language since the turn of the century. The US-based Carnegie Foundation has begun to finance collaborative initiatives between the US and other countries to support academic studies and teach English. On the other hand, since the disagreements in the language led to international crises, both sides of the Atlantic agreed to form a simple form of English with the expectation that it would strengthen international understanding. Following this development, the Foreign Office was established in 1920 for the protection of British communities in foreign countries, and after 1934 was engaged in cultural activities. The British Council, established in the same year, devoted all of its efforts to these issues. In a royal edict issued by the British Council in 1940, the aim of the institution was to improve the understanding of English abroad and to establish close cultural relations between Great Britain and other countries and to promote the interests of the British Commonwealth. In 1941, the aim of the British Council was to formulate the friendship-based knowledge and understanding, the philosophy of life and style of life in the overseas countries, which would make British foreign policy somewhat attractive. Thus, the establishment of cultural institutions and Anglophile associations that accept English as the language of communication, the provision of scholarships for education in the UK, the support of British schools in foreign countries, book donations, exhibitions and theater performances are considered as the main activities of the British Council (Phillipson 2008: 76).

### **The cases facilitating the opportunity for British Council to work in the People's Houses**

Considering the aim of maintaining and improving the movements and movements of the social reforms and social progress in the country, which is one of the reasons of the official establishment of the People's Houses and

People's Halls (C.H.P. Halkevleri ve Halkodaları 1932-1942: 3) the British Council's activities in the fields of education, culture and arts abroad, it is seen that there are conditions that bring these two institutions together. On the other hand, the views of the Minister of Education Hasan Ali Yücel during his visit to England in 1945, which he recognized as a nation that knows his interests well and that he knows well, suggests that the establishment of close ties with the British Council with an facilitating effect of the bureaucrats in Turkey (Yücel 1958: 42). "An efficient organization promoting two nations each other" (Yücel 1958: 149) as considered by Yücel, People's Houses were the one of the leading organizations suitable for the British Council to conduct the activities in Turkey (Aral 2014: 82). As Ahmet Emin Yalman states, the British Council, which operates with BBC Radio in Turkey has provided a tremendous contribution to the development of Turkish-British relations. In this respect, the British Council, which pursues a culture-based propaganda method, has been involved in a planned and intensive work for the People's Houses (Malkoç 2009: 25). First of all, British Council officials closely monitored the People's Houses, have implemented several visits for the purpose of learning to look for ways to cooperate with the People's Houses and have reported their impressions. In a report on the People's Houses of 1943 prepared by E. W. E. Tomlin, it has taken place that Turkey has been close to Britain and the British Council in a politically powerful way and it is also noted that if Turkey persists with this understanding and care, Great Britain and the British Council can play a major role in the development of modern Turkish culture (The National Archive (TNA), Records of the British Council (BW) 61/9, Report on the Turkish Halkevleri By E.W.E. Tomlin: 7). Tomlin, states that British Council's Turkey representative Michael Grant was respected within the government circles and by the People's Party officials and for the success of his visit in Turkey is due to the friendly relations between the Turkish authorities in Turkey with the British Council in Turkey (TNA BW,61/9, Report on the Turkish Halkevleri By E.W.E. Tomlin: 7). However, despite this assessment, in case of facilitation that could mean privilege to the British Council by ministry of education officials in Turkey, it is particularly noticeable that they especially avoided recognizing a privilege for the British Council fearing that other countries can also demand similar concessions. (TNA BW, 61/9, Report on the Turkish Halkevleri By E.W.E. Tomlin: 7).

The expressions in a letter sent by Grant, British Council representative in Turkey, to the London headquarter reveal the attitude of the RPP leaders on the issue. According to Grant, the Peoples' Party will welcome the increase in the number of British teachers. In addition, teaching English in the People's Houses and being the first and only foreign language taught there will require a significant expenditure. According to Grant; moreover, since the Turkish statesmen would want to continue this work and target an even wider audience after the war, it is highly unreasonable to make a request for financial contribution from the Turkish government (TNA BW, 61/9, Extract from Letter from Mr. Michael Grant, The British Council Representative's Office, Ref: ACC/4/3, March 12, 1943).

1943 was the year in which the RPP established various procedures for linking the British Council's activities in the field of English teaching in the People's Houses. According to Grant, these procedures must be strictly adhered in order to strengthen relations with the Turks. The first thing that stood out was the fact that teachers' appointments and other works to be done in the People's Houses were notified to the People's Party officials in a hierarchical order. According to this; it is very important that all the plans related to the British Council or British, People's Houses relations and all issues related to teaching English are presented to the party centers by the representative of the council in Ankara not by the People's Houses authorities or the party's provincial units (TNA BW, 61/9, Relations With the People's Party, Ref: REP/11, January 29, 1943). Apart from this, when the rules of the RPP are considered; in spite of the desire to avoid short-term courses, it is seen that the party is ready to authorize the opening of language courses lasting only three months in the People's Houses, especially in the popular cities. Another noteworthy rule was that the party requested that the lists of teachers to be prepared by the British Council should be sent before 31 July 1943, in case of a teacher change in the middle of the academic year. Another issue was the desire of the party authorities to appoint British educators rather than Turkish teachers in the Community Centers. Grant's comment on this article is also very interesting. So, the British Council is asked to take careful steps in this regard in order not to offend Turkish teachers (TNA BW, 61/9, Relations With the People's Party, Ref: REP/11, January 29, 1943). Nevertheless, the People's Party is satisfied that the British or Turkish people work as English teachers in the People's Houses and that the British Council

finances these activities. However, it was requested that the important issues be sent first to the council representative in Ankara and then forwarded to the party headquarters by him and it was explained that the provincial party officials would be informed by the headquarters. Procedures include the British Council asking Turkish citizens not to be appointed as managers or managers within the scope of these activities (TNA BW, 61/9, Relations With the People's Party, Ref: REP/11, January 29, 1943).

It should be noted that the positive attitudes of the RPP Secretary-General Ahmet Fikri Tüzer's about the British Council has created an effect that paved the way for these institutions in Turkey. As stated in Michael Grant's report on the People's Houses; without the reference of Tüzer, no branch of the People's Houses would accept British Council language courses. As a result of the negotiations between Grant and Tüzer, the opening of new language classes was approved (TNA BW, 61/9, To Miss Instone, Ref: TUR/20/2, Jul 10, 1942). In these dates, in the process of establishing a people's house branch in London, it was an important action that the British Council officials have demonstrated their dedication and solidarity in the name of winning the sympathy of the public, the political and bureaucratic circles of Turkey. In fact, the idea of establishing a people's house in London was based on the views and wishes of Sir Wyndham Deeds, the representative of the Turkish-British Committee established to assist victims of the 1939 Erzincan Earthquake, and British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden and the British Council. As a matter of fact, this project was put into practice with the proposal submitted to the RPP Secretary General on 12 February 1942 (Malkoç 2014: 36). According to an opinion; the fact that British support the London People's House, which was opened in order to get to know each country people, with a political interest better, is understood from the fact that they turn their back on the organization in London in 1945 as they failed to put Turkey into the war (Aral 2014: 88). But, what matters here is the point that the British Council's improving the working conditions in Turkey without encountering bureaucratic obstacles are due to the relations between Turkish and British authorities on the basis of mutual goodwill. It is seen that Turkish-British relations are advancing on the basis of cooperation under the political and diplomatic conditions determined by the World War II. In fact, during the opening of the London People's House branch, the following statements in the message

sent to Grant to be delivered to Fikri Tüzer by Sir Malcom Robertson, Director of the British Council, reveal the basis on which the relations are taking place: “Fundamentals of the London People’s House, which symbolizes the close relationship between the two countries to show the achievements of modern Turkey to the Great Britain public will be a very valuable role to develop Turkish-British relations. I am pleased that our Council has made a small contribution to the activities of the People’s Party” (TNA BW, 61/9, Ref: TUR/20/2, From Sir Malcolm Robertson to Mr. Grant, February 17, 1942). Fikri Tüzer expressed his satisfaction by giving the following statements in his reply to Robertson: “I have no doubt that the London Community Center will work as a productive part of the visionary thinking of our countries’ cultural relations. I express my gratitude and respect for the valuable assistance and interest of the British Council, which is the main factor in the establishment of this Community Center” (TNA BW, 61/9, From Dr. Tuzer to Sir Malcolm Robertson, Ref: TUR/20/2, February 19, 1942). In view of the concrete steps that can be seen in addition to these statements of goodwill, providing permission to travel in the country for the British Council staff appointed in language courses of the People’s Houses in remote rural regions of Turkey, shows the direction of a given bureaucratic support (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Notes on Teaching Statistics, TUR/8/7, January 16, 1942). On the other hand, in the reports prepared by the British authorities, it was often emphasized that the friendly attitude of the provincial party officials, depending on Tüzer’s reference, also had a facilitating effect on the conduct of language courses (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Michael Grant’s Report on Turkey for the Quarter April-June, 1941, TUR/8/7, October 30, 1941).

### **Language courses and other activities in the People’s Houses**

In the 1940s, it is seen that British Council’s name is often mentioned in Turkey, especially in the field of language education. Language courses opened in the People’s Houses of Turkey’s rural area could be carried out with the help of government officials and party leaders in RPP provincial organization. The reports that the officials of the British Council Office in Turkey submitted to the head office in London contain very detailed information about the operation of these language courses. It is understood from the reports that quite an intense effort on the language courses conducted in various provinces in the People’s Houses of Turkey from 1942-

43 to 1945 is seen. When we look at the number of adults taking language education in the language courses in the People's Houses, it is seen that a considerable number of trainees are obtained. According to the official statistics of the People's Houses in 1943, the number of students attending language courses in the first half of 1943 was 3987, of which 3312 learned English in British Council courses and approximately 700 in other languages (TNA BW, 61/9, The British Council Representative Office, Ref: HA/A/1, March 30, 1944). The statistics in 1942 report contain information about the trainees attending the language courses. According to this; of the 2899 students studying in the first quarter of the year, 95% were Muslim Turks and approximately 25% were women. Of the trainees, 1680 was consisted of schools affiliated to the National Education Organization, 775 was consisted of higher and technical education institutions, and the remaining 905 was consisted of students in secondary education institutions. Of the remaining 1219 students, most of them were adults and 928 were educated by the council in the People's Houses, 129 of the remaining 291 were civil servants and 162 were military bureaucracy officers (TNA BW, 61/9, Notes on Teaching Statistics, TUR/8/7, January 16, 1942). When the number is considered, it is seen that English is very important in the People's Houses. The most important detail Malcolm Robertson, one of the council's officials, witnessed during his travels was a general preference for English courses at the request of the government. Consequently, the perception of the council's work as a true friendship by the Turkish people and Michael Grant's reputation in Turkey has been effective in gaining prevalence of language courses (TNA BW, 61/9, Extract from a Report by Sir Malcolm Robertson on his Tour Through the Middle East Confidential, January to April 1943). In terms of showing citizens' interest in language courses in the People's Houses, in a report about Afyon, even the council officials were surprised that the quotas in the course lists were filled in the first week. Marry Hood, who did not find an accurate interpretation of this situation due to the fact that there is nothing to do in Afyon, stated that even in the middle of the summer, the doctors, civil servants, high school students and engineers followed the courses regularly and stated that the trainees who are in the profession could improve their careers through English (TNA BW, 61/9, From Marry R.S.M. Hood to Michael Grant, TUR/18/8, October 18, 1942).

In addition to the language courses offered by the British Council in People's Houses, there have been some initiatives to enrich libraries and increase English language publications. Among the publications that interest the trainees in Afyon were publications such as "Do you speak English ?, Country Life and de luxe" (TNA BW, 61/9, From Marry R.S.M. Hood to Michael Grant, TUR/18/8, October 18, 1942). The idea of Council's supporting libraries in the People's Houses was reported by Grant, the representative of Turkey, to the British Embassy. According to Grant, since the RPP wants to open an English department in all People's Houses, sending a 40-volume sample library to 50 People's Houses will have positive results. Among the information transferred to the Foreign Office, Grant's statements draw attention: "in my opinion, libraries should contain general works in all scientific fields, works of famous British writers, the introduction of England and books for beginner readers" (TNA BW, 61/9, From Angora to Foreign Office, Departmental No.1, June 10, 1942). It was seen that the council took more concrete steps in the future in terms of enriching libraries and establishing model libraries in some places. For libraries established in places such as Çanakkale and Edirne, encyclopedias, books on medicine, books on general scientific issues, books on engineering, agriculture and biology, electricity and city planning, as well as books by British authors from Shakespeare to Presley have been added to this collection. These model libraries, approved by the RPP General Administrative Board, attracted the attention of the public and local press in the cities where they were established (TNA BW, 61/9, Presentation of Halkevi Libraries, August 31st 1944).

The biggest problem encountered in English courses started in community centers was the issue of teacher recruitment. A significant amount had to be provided for the salaries of the teachers who took part in the 50 courses. As a result of Grant's efforts, without entering into an expectation from Turkey, salaries of teachers could be paid. On the other hand, Turkish teachers were also assigned in case of English teachers falling behind. Although the authorities tried to prevent the English origin teachers who did not speak any Turkish at Kadıkoy People's House, these teachers continued their duties due to the lack of teachers. An opposite example was experienced in Istanbul. M. Reşat Mimaroglu, one of the prominent officials of the RPP, thought that it would be more appropriate to appoint one of British origin in the People's House. According to this request, A.R. Thompson left Salonika



and was assigned to Istanbul (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Michael Grant's Report on Turkey for the Quarter October-December 1940, TUR/20/2). Nearly 80 students attending language courses at the Kadıköy People's House were taught by a teacher who had no involvement with the Council and was educated at the American College due to lack of teachers (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Notes on Teaching Statistics, TUR/8/7, January 16, 1942). At the Ankara People's House, there was a livelier learning environment. Messrs, Lucas, Jago and Rayner who were among the teachers giving courses, worked under the favorable conditions provided by Ferit Celal Güven, People's House Director. Also, at the Ankara People's House, private lessons such as "Learning English" by Prof. Hamley "phonetics" by Dr. Crews and "English literature" by Mr. Jago were given (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Michael Grant's Report on Turkey for the Quarter April-June, 1941, TUR/8/7). In cities such as Manisa and Izmir, there has been a wide participation in courses at the People's Houses. Following the positive results obtained from the courses in Çanakkale and Edirne, language courses were opened in centers such as Samsun, Bolu, Aydın, Trabzon, Söke, Adana and Nazilli and then Kayseri, Tarsus and İskenderun were included in the program. Teachers employed in language courses have a diverse social background. Linguists from American College, American High School and the Scottish school worked in courses at Community Centers (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Michael Grant's Report on Turkey for the Quarter April-June, 1941, TUR/8/7, October 30, 1941). When looked at the identity of the participants of the language courses, an image that is far from homogeneity emerges. For example, among the participants of the language course at the Çanakkale People's House, officers from the garrisons of the region also attended these courses in order to learn a language for their professional careers (TNA BW, 61/9, Quarterly Report on General Progress in Turkey, TUR/20/2, March 3, 1941). In particular, officers in the regional military garrisons had no place to acquire the foreign language skills outside of the People's Houses courses in a city like Çanakkale.

In the report on the courses of Samsun indicated that the prejudice prevailing in the community against English in previous years was broken and there was a substantial demand for learning English. On the other hand, the issue of how many students participated in the level groups created in the courses was calculated precisely and added to the report. When the

courses given at Samsun People's House are examined, it is seen that British culture and lifestyle are tried to be introduced. On various dates, a wide range of participation was provided to the conferences, including *the British Education System, British Life, British Primary and Secondary Schools, English Literature, British Universities and Contemporary English Literature*, by RPP provincial officials and local governors (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Jago's Report on Samsun Halkevi Teaching, Summer 1942, TUR/20/2).

### **British Council and some important issues featured in the People's Houses relations**

In fact, especially not only language courses of the British Council's at the People's Houses in Turkey, but exhibitions and conferences on various subjects were also the same as those in many regions of the world during the same period. Basically, against the cultural and political propaganda that the Axis countries intensified during the war years, the People's Houses in Turkey were seen the most appropriate center for cultural diplomacy activities that can be considered in the same struggle of the UK. The British Council's activities, which appear rather as language courses, implicitly suggest concepts such as cultural transfer, cultural diplomacy, public opinion formation and social mobilization. When looked at the reports on these activities of the Council, it was understood that the language courses were more complex rather than purely theoretical. In addition to language transfer, the courses in Bursa aims to enable the participants to become familiar with Western music. The youngest of the trainees were taught children's songs, while adults were taught sailor songs such as "Twankydilo" and "Shenandoah". Besides, there was an intensive participation in piano lessons, and it is planned to hold concerts at the People's Houses with the records of the Council (TNA BW, 61/9, Extract from Quarterly Report-Bursa Directorate, TUR/16/1/5, April 6, 1944). When the reports and correspondence related to the Council's activities were subject to content evaluation, it was observed that the word patterns were frequently included, such as spreading English culture and increasing the number of English speakers. Inclusion of the books introducing English culture in public libraries and the appointment of British teachers in cities such as Sivas and Kayseri where no English is spoken are of the embodiments (TNA BW, 61/9, From Michael Grant to Everett, Ref No: ACC/4, March 4, 1942).

Another dimension of the language courses in People's Houses was to make English more popular than other foreign languages in Turkey (TNA BW, 61/9, Extract from a Letter from Michael Grant, TUR/6/1, February 25, 1942). On the basis of spreading English worldwide, aside from the debates on language imperialism that began in the 1960s, language courses opened by the British Council in Turkey was also a functional tool in the competition with languages such as French and German. As a matter of fact, the fear that the courses in the People's Houses will be blocked by Germany has been frequently expressed and it was emphasized that the support of RPP politicians should be provided thanks to keep warm relations with Turkey to prevent this fear (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Michael Grants's Report on Turkey for the Quarter April-June, 1941, TUR/20/2). This was reflected in the Council's internal correspondence with the following sentences:

Although the Council's main objective is to expand the culture of England abroad, we support the opposite where possible. We also want England to understand other countries better. We help the Turks to open a Community Center in London. In addition, we are conducting researches for the publication of Süleyman Çelebi's "Mevlid" in English. The Ministry of Education has an idea of pressing the 30-volume Encyclopedia of Inonu in Turkey. We promised to help with this. Of course, this process is a slow process (TNA BW, 61/9, From M.H.S. Everett to Mr. Edward, TUR/20/2, November 11, 1941).

While British Council officials were sorting the obstacles likely to encounter about expanding their operations in Turkey, they evaluated the dominant political culture and traditions prevailing in Turkey in a detailed way. Based on the considerations included in these reviews, although Turkey is not intended as resurrecting the Ottoman Empire, it is mentioned that there may be a strong nationalism movement for the future and the ambitions of unification with 20 million Turks beyond the Caspian are alive. According to the assessment that this is a dream never come true; nevertheless, it is stated that it is essential to consider (TNA W, 61/9, Report on te Turkish Halkevleri by E.W.E. Tomlin: 1). The thoughts expressed in an evaluation in another correspondence are also the exemplary of diagnosing the fundamental dichotomy that Turkey's modernization/, westernization adventure resulted in, in addition to showing what details the Council officials are working with.

In terms of cultural activities, Turkey is a country which needs special attention. The idea planted by Atatürk was rooted as the individual culture of the Turks. What lies under the idea of culture, which is not clearly understood by us, is also difficult to express by the Turks. The positive thing is that they feel they need to protect it from foreigners and non-Turkish influences. They don't want to be assimilated by foreign ideas. They are also interested in technical and scientific knowledge for the most trained teachers from outside to teach. They want to use the West, but they don't want to imitate it. They want help, but they don't want custody. The Turkish Government will always control how much foreign influence will penetrate its people (TNA BW, 61/9, From Sir Percy Loraine to the Chancellor, TUR/20/2, April 22, 1941).

These assessments penned out from Sir Percy Loraine who was Turkey's ambassador in Ankara for many years as England's senior diplomat were based on really accurate comments as it was interesting. According to Loraine; as many things can be done in Turkey within the limits set by the government, this nationalist idea can also be overcome with the cooperation relations to be established with softening in time of the limits in Turkey where nationalism is intense. Turkey, taking position as an independent nation after the Ottoman Empire area, rejected Germany and turned to England. Another issue is about a request to be exempt from taxation of the salaries of British teachers in Turkey would be inconvenient to suggest because it would remind the issue of capitulations with deep traces in the Turkish historical memory (TNA BW, 61/9, From Sir Percy Loraine to the Chancellor, TUR/20/2, April 22, 1941). There was a bi-directional interaction between the Turkish authorities and the Council's administration regarding the exhibitions held in the people's houses. Whereas the British see these exhibitions as an important tool to meet British culture with the public in Turkey's rural (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Jago's Report on Samsun Halkevi Teaching, TUR/20/2, October 10, 1942), the following statements that Mithat Orel, the director of Izmir People's House, gave in a speech show the hope of the Turkish side from bilateral relations: "We take the example of Western countries in an effort to improve general knowledge and science. Our nation is one of the first nations to establish civilization. Historical reasons and mismanagement prevented us from adjusting. Despite this, the Republic is making great efforts. We strive for our goal to deliver Turkey and

the Turkish people to the highest point of civilization, and we will achieve it. Our main goal is to increase the knowledge of educational and social progress in our people achieved in other countries. In line with this goal, we were very pleased with the British Council exhibition opening offer in Turkey” (TNA BW, 61/9, Mr. Lake’s Report on Smyrna July-August 1942, TUR/20/2, October 10, 1942).

## **Conclusion**

In addition to People’s Houses prominent function in educating the society in line with the modernization, the importance of them has started to be understood in terms of national security in the interwar period when the world politics began to escalate and the ideologies on which international military and economic competition were based entered into a tough struggle to create new spans. At this point, the People’s Houses, which are seen as a center where European states will perform propaganda methods, have been followed closely by the UK-origin British Council with which Turkey has entered into an alliance relation in the international arena. The People’s Houses along with the Village Institutes of Turkey’s major cultural institutions were among unique institutions that the British Council can conduct its activities, When Turkey’s level of culture in society and the British Council’s literacy rate is considered in the mentioned period, the most reasonable way to reach the target audience was through social groups that constitute the People’s Houses. Because almost all of the people who participated in the cultural activities carried out in the People’s Houses were people with a certain level of culture and education. In this sense, by preparing detailed reports on the People’s Houses, the British Council Turkey Office officials searched for ways to work in these institutions. As a result of the close relations with the political elites of the RPP, the British Council was provided with the opportunity to work as language courses, exhibitions and conferences in the People’s Houses. The basic working principle that the single party leaders in Turkey requested from the authority of British Council was to act in accordance with the hierarchical order in the country. Both the Council officials and dignitaries in Turkey have avoided earnestly from the concessions or privileges which can remind the old order at a time the Ottoman traces in memory yet maintains the freshness. In this context, it was demanded that the British Council’s activities in Turkey

to be carried out on a ground that would not prejudice issues such as full independence and national sovereignty, which are the basic principles of the early Republican period.

The basic character of the activities of the British Council in People's Houses can only be explained from the experience of British cultural diplomacy. The pursuit of this method without resorting to concepts such as cultural diplomacy, linguistic imperialism or political propaganda will undoubtedly lead the researcher to mistake. Indeed, trying to explain each of the British Council's activities in Turkey with the concepts such as missionary, colonialism or cultural imperialism through collaborators, which are too deep and should be studied in detached way, will mean that the main characteristics of the period will be missed. In this study, the British Council's starting to organize in the Middle East, Balkans, Mediterranean Basin and African countries since the early 1930s was evaluated within the scope of cultural expansion due to propaganda and political competition, which is a part of the general global politics of the period. The political propaganda effectively used by countries such as France, Italy and Germany, one of the founding forces of world politics in the said period, was carried out in a hasty manner by England with a sense of relatively late in time. The language courses in the People's Houses, which are the scene of these activities, include a period in which the aforementioned hastiness has been replaced by a professional working practice. Indeed, in the era of Turkey, in terms of communication and transportation facilities which is quite limited with the provinces, officials working for the British Council have opened language courses even in the most remote provinces of the country. In these courses, where modern teaching techniques are used, the development status of Turkish citizens from all sectors trained are recorded and reported to the relevant places. As a result, in the most general sense, the review that these language courses were to gain prevalence of the English language in Turkey and to establish a relationship between the societies of the Turkish-British can be done.

These courses, which can be considered to be a dimension of diplomatic rapprochement in the relations between the two countries, have been evaluated by the Turkish authorities as a part of cultural modernization. From the UK's point of view, these courses are the product of a highly

complex policy. First of all, these courses are considered to be a set in front of the German and French cultural expansion and are also the results of the global cultural competition. The concept of linguistic imperialism produced within the scope of the new literature in the social sciences especially with the rise of post-colonialism since the 1960s has launched a new discussion on the British Council's language courses. This concept gave birth to more intense debate in countries with colonial past, while in Turkey has not been the subject of academic research.

## Notes

- 1 In an interview with Phillipson, he found the criticism of linguistic imperialism unfair and explained that the accusation was nothing more than a Marxist point of view. However, in spite of this view that dominates contemporary Western philosophy, he argues that the activities considered within the context of linguistic imperialism are naive and innocent as to provide an alternative Western cultural perspective to the current order. Robert Phillipson talks to Sohail Karmani, "Linguistic Imperialism 10 Years on: An Interview with Robert Phillipson". *ELT Journal* 59 (3): 244-249.

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# Dil Emperyalizmi mi Kültürel Diplomasi mi? Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde British Council ve Halkevleri\*

Resul Babaoğlu\*\*

## Öz

Bu araştırmada Türkiye'deki varlığı çeşitli spekülasyonlara konu edilmiş olan British Council'in 1940'lı yılların başında Halkevlerinde başlatmış olduğu dil kursları, dil emperyalizmi ve kültürel propaganda kavramları etrafında incelenmiştir. Ayrıca çalışma kapsamında, II. Dünya Savaşı'na denk gelen bu dönemde Avrupalı büyük devletlerin etkili bir mücadele aracı olarak kullandıkları propaganda olgusu da British Council'in Türkiye'deki faaliyetlerini incelemek için yararlanılan kavramlardan biri olmuştur. İngilizcenin dünya dili haline getirilmesi şiarıyla başlayan İngiliz kültürel propagandası, iki savaş arası dönemde British Council'in kurulmasından sonra sistematik bir faaliyet haline getirilmiş, II. Dünya Savaşı sırasında ise Mihver Devletleri'nin kültürel alandaki yayılmalarına karşı kullanılarak siyasal bir mücadele enstürmanı olarak görülmüştür. British Council'in Halkevlerinde açtığı dil kursları, İngilizler açısından kültürel propagandanın bir unsuru olarak görülürken dönemin Türkiye'sinin siyasal elitleri ise British Council'in faaliyetlerini Batılılaşma/modernleşme serüveninde itici bir güç olarak değerlendirmişlerdir.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Türkiye, British Council, Halkevleri, dil emperyalizmi, kültürel propaganda.

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# Языковой империализм или культурная дипломатия? Британский совет и Народные дома в ранней республиканской Турции\*

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## Аннотация

Данное исследование рассматривает в рамках языкового империализма и культурной пропаганды языковые курсы, организованные Британским советом в Народных домах в начале 1940-х годов, присутствие которых в Турции было предметом различных спекуляций. Кроме того, в этот период Второй мировой войны факт пропаганды, которая является эффективным средством борьбы великих европейских держав, также является одной из концепций, используемых для изучения деятельности Британского Совета в Турции. Британская культурная пропаганда, начавшаяся с принципа превращения английского в мировой язык, была преобразована в систематическую деятельность после создания Британского совета, а во время Второй мировой войны она рассматривалась как инструмент политической борьбы против распространения стран гитлеровской коалиции в культурной сфере. В то время как языковые курсы Британского совета в Народных домах рассматриваются как часть культурной пропаганды британцев, политическая элита Турции в тот период рассматривала деятельность Британского совета как движущую силу в ее движении к вестернизации / модернизации.

## Ключевые слова

Турция, Британский Совет, народные дома, языковой империализм, культурная пропаганда.

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