

(AB)USE OF LANGUAGE – ORWELL'S NEWSPEAK IN TODAY'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

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Abstract: Language is defined as the distinctive human ability that has a great role in molding humans' thoughts and deeds. It is a unique tool that is not used simply to communicate but also to apprehend and even to give shape to reality. One of the major themes presented in Orwell's famous dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is using language to control minds. Orwell warns us about the consequences of language being employed in the context of ideological politics. The authors of the paper analyze semantic and pragmatic nuances of Newspeak, as well as the possibilities of its exploitation by modern means of communication in suppressing creativity, freedom and individuality. The indispensable connection between language and thinking process, as well as the power of the literature in shaping and re-thinking the postulates of modern society, emphasize the need for cultural and linguistic studies devoted to philosophical and ethical questioning of language (ab)use in order to exert dominance, power and control.

Key words: language, Orwell, control, semantics, literature, dystopia

1. INTRODUCTION

Works about Orwell and his work are still being written seventy years after his death. The multitude of books and articles written about Orwell have in fact very little to do with literary interpretation and are mostly concerned with the details of Orwell's life and his political views, which suggests that critics (and readers) are attracted to Orwell as a person as much as Orwell as a writer. This approach is not unjustified. Most of Orwell's works are not only autobiographical, but personal, and it is this personal note in Orwell's work that attracts attention. Orwell also expresses a certain kind of anti-intellectualism, which fascinates intellectuals, and this trait of his personality is responsible for the fact that his reputation does not fade.

Immensely modest and simple, reserved and silent in his personal affairs and contacts, which is in contrast to the passionate polemic of his best essayistic and documentary prose, Orwell succeeded in what only a few writers have managed to do - to write his own name into the English language. The adjective "Orwellian" has become a commonly used word around the world, which we use as an adjective in a pejorative sense when we want to describe totalitarian violence, falsification of history by the state - therefore, an organized lie, and in a looser sense, any unpleasant example of repression or manipulation, whereas the noun "Orwellian" is used to designate an Orwellian admirer and follower. Sometimes, this word is also used as a positive adjective in the sense of "exceptional intellectual honesty, like Orwell's". [1]

Richard J. Vorehess believes that Orwell was one of the most paradoxical writers of his time - an intellectual who ridiculed intellectuals, a first-rate political writer despite his horror at politics, a successful pamphleteer despite constant warnings to readers to be mindful of the prejudices he expressed. [2] He is probably the most notable example of a writer who is better known for the various social movements that interpreted him as they saw fit and accordingly adopted him as a future leader in his absence than for his prose. *1984* is one of the most abundantly exploited cultural references today, and it seems that in recent years nothing can escape the alarmingly large number of those with a pen in hand who will look back at the recurring question at every opportunity: what would Orwell say?

What are the reasons, what is it that made Orwell so attractive to all possible parts of the political spectrum? Already in the 20th century, it became clear that more advanced technology does not bring better social relations, that is, that "political" practices, directed by the interests of the powerful classes, continue to only vary the old ways of governing states and the world.

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Orwell was one of the first to notice the interdependence of the development of sociopathological dynamics and rapid technological development, whereby the 21st century brings the emergence of new ways of manipulation and subjugation.

2. USE AND ABUSE OF LANGUAGE

Consumer hysteria, the proliferation of advertising strategies and manipulation of the media, modify some tactical settings of totalitarianism, but do not change its basic essence, which Orwell exposed in *1984* as the aspiration for totalitarian control, which implies the destruction of the supporting interests of individuals and groups.

Well-known British publicist Timothy Garton Ash considers Orwell one of the most influential political writers of the 20th century. Ash compares him with Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Albert Camus as well as with Berthold Brecht and philosophers such as Karl Popper, Friedrich von Heck and Jean-Paul Sartre. In the book *Orwell and Politics*, Ash asks the question "Why should one still read Orwell?" and gives the following answer: "If I had to name one feature that makes Orwell still indispensable for reading in the 21st century, it would certainly be his insight into the use and abuse of language." [3] Ash cites Orwell's claim that "the falsification of language is central to most oppressive or exploitative policies." [4] The defense of the indefensible is always supported by a barrage of euphemisms, false verbal turns, recycled phrases and all the other props of deception that Orwell, in Ash's opinion, discovers and parodies.

Orwell himself did not only train us how to sense the semantic abuse of language. He also suggested a way to strike back, and compared good English prose to a clean window pane. Through these windows, citizens can see what their rulers are really up to. Therefore, political writers should be window cleaners of freedom. "Orwell tells us and shows us how to do it at the same time. That's why we still need him. His work can never be finished." [5]

At first glance, *1984* seems to belong to an established tradition of satire, illustrated by works of a similar characteristics, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, Butler's *Edgin*, and Huxley's *Brave New World*. Already after the end of the first page, it is clear that this is a novel of a different kind, which leads us to a rather unpleasant discovery - that it is not satire at all. The satire contains a certain distance in relation to the circumstances that we encounter in everyday life, and we are allowed to live in the illusion of our own correctness, whereas in *1984* we can recognize specific people, events and time. Some authors argue that *1984* is a projection of the future based on a realistic synthesis and arrangement of familiar and well-known material, rather than on prophetic and imaginary speculations. [6] It is a fact that it is very difficult to predict the future in a world that rapidly changes in technical and technological terms, but Meyers believes that most of Orwell's visions of the future are not prophetic, but represent the descriptions of events that have already taken place. *1984* is a warning about the future, but also a satire of the present, as well as an ironic parody of literary and political themes that repeatedly questions the relationship between catastrophe and rebirth, the relationship between economic and industrial collapse and hope for the future, the belief in the destruction of the old social order for the sake of a new one.

1984 is characterized by a critical attitude towards the present and utopian projects, while the futuristic dimension and reliance on science are only a basis for considering some basic anthropological problems. The realization of utopia as such is impossible, and setting the plot of the novel in the future helped the author to present an alternative reality as a warning of the dangers whose roots are present now. Therefore, we can say that *1984* contains features of anti-utopian literature both formally and thematically.

The satirical mode of narration is closely related to criticism as a thematic process. Thanks to "disruption" as an essential feature of negative utopias, we adopt the world that Orwell offers us in *1984* as quite possible and probable. The first part of the book, which consists of eight chapters, creates a picture of the world in 1984, a totalitarian society in which everything is under the control of Party, even human feelings. The party exercises control over the citizens through an omniscient secret policy and the use of a contrived language, Newspeak, invented for the purpose of controlling the minds and behaviour of the people who are also under constant surveillance.

The motive of alienation dominates in *1984*. Every communication is marked by the fear that one can be accused of a “thought crime“. Telescreens monitor all activities, it is impossible to turn them off, and they enable the ruling party to monitor citizens and their activities. Communication between people is reduced to the exchange of a few pieces of information, which must be in the spirit of “Ingsoc” because Big Brother sees and hears everything. One of the most monstrous inventions of the Party is the creation of Newspeak, the language of the Party. Each subsequent edition of the Newspeak dictionary has fewer words than the previous one. By reducing the fund of words and narrowing their meaning, the Party tries to protect itself not only from rebellious acts, but also from thoughts. Without words that signify revolution, there can be no revolution. Those who manage to think for themselves represent criminals who have committed a thought crime and are taken by the Thought Police to the Ministry of Truth (another absurd name), where they are subjected to brainwashing, methods of re-education and reintegration, or they are killed.

One of Orwell’s most important messages in *1984* is that language is of central importance to human thought because it structures and limits the ideas that individuals are capable of formulating and expressing. Orwell believed that totalitarianism and the corruption of language were connected. As an example, in *Politics and the English Language*, he said that ‘If thoughts can corrupt language, language can also corrupt thoughts.’ [7] Newspeak incorporates doublethink, as it contains many words that create assumed associations between contradictory meanings, especially true of fundamentally important words such as **good** and **evil**; **right** and **wrong**; **truth** and **falsehood**; **justice** and **injustice**. In the case of workers at the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth, doublethink means being able to falsify public records, and then believe in the new history that they, themselves, had just written. As revealed in Goldstein’s Book, the Ministry’s name is itself an example of doublethink: the Ministry of Truth is really concerned with lies. The other ministries of Airstrip One are similarly named: the Ministry of Peace is concerned with war, the Ministry of Love is concerned with torture and the Ministry of Plenty is concerned with starvation.

The media is skilled at engineering ‘truth’ through language, and one of the most disturbing consequences of this is that the Party has ultimate control over history. After all, language is the link to history. Winston’s job in the Ministry of Truth is to modify news items and other documents that in one way or another make the Party look bad. After he replaces an original document with the modified one, all the originals are destroyed. As well as altering the past by manipulating written language, the Party has an ingenious plan to break the link with the real past by introducing a language barrier. When “all real knowledge of Oldspeak [disappears] . . . the whole literature of the past will have been destroyed”.. [8] After a few generations, when people are no longer capable of decoding information from the past, there will no longer even be a need to censor the history that has the potential for breeding unorthodox ideas — it will be completely out of the public’s reach. Thus, the manipulation of language and text not only effects the present, but also the past and future in more than one way. A Party slogan in the novel reads, “Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past”. [9]

Orwell’s novel carries a well-founded warning about the power of language. It shows how language can shape people’s sense of reality, how it can be used to conceal truths, and even how it can be used to manipulate history. “Language is one of the key instruments of political dominations, the necessary and insidious means of the ‘totalitarian’ control of reality” [10] . While language in the traditional sense can expand horizons and improve our understanding of the world, Orwell’s novel demonstrates that language, when used in a maliciously political way, can just as easily become “a plot against human consciousness”. [11]

Newspeak words are classified by three distinct classes: the A, B, and C vocabularies. The words of the A vocabulary describe the functional concepts of daily life (e.g. eating and drinking, working and cooking). It consists mostly of English words, but they are very small in number compared to English, and each word’s meanings are “far more rigidly defined” than in English.

The words of the B vocabulary are deliberately constructed for political purposes to convey complex ideas in a simple form. They are compound words and noun-verbs with political significance that are meant to impose and instill in Oceania’s citizens the correct mental attitudes required by the Party. In the appendix, Orwell explains that the very structure of the B vocabulary (the fact that they are compound words) carries ideological weight. The large number of contractions in the B

vocabulary—for example, the Ministry of Truth being called Minitrue, the Records Department being called Recdep, the Fiction Department being called Ficdep, the Teleprogrammes Department being called Teledep—is not done simply to save time. As with examples of compound words in the political language of the 20th century—Nazi, Gestapo, Politburo, Comintern, Inprecor, Agitprop, and many others—Orwell remarks that the Party believed that abbreviating a name could "narrowly and subtly" alter a word's meaning. Newspeak is supposed to make this effort a conscious purpose.

The B words in Newspeak are supposed to sound pleasant, while also being easily pronounceable, in an attempt to make speech on anything political "staccato and monotonous" and, ultimately, mask from the speaker all ideological content.

The words of the C vocabulary are scientific and technical terms that supplement the linguistic functions of the A and B vocabularies. These words are the same scientific terms in English, but many of them have had their meanings rigidified to attempt, as with the A vocabulary, to prevent speakers from being able to express anti-government thoughts. Distribution of the C vocabulary is limited, because the Party does not want citizens to know more than a select few ways of life or techniques of production. Hence, the Oldspeak word *science* has no equivalent term in Newspeak; instead, these words are simply treated as specific technical words for speaking of technical fields.

Newspeak's grammar is greatly simplified compared to English. It also has two "outstanding" characteristics: almost completely interchangeable linguistic functions between the parts of speech (any word can function as a verb, noun, adjective, or adverb), and heavy inflectional regularity in the construction of usages and of words. Inflectional regularity means that most irregular words are replaced with regular words combined with prefixes and suffixes.

In Newspeak, English root-words function both as nouns and as verbs, which reduces the vocabulary available for the speaker to communicate meaning; e.g. as a noun and as a verb, the word *think* eliminates the word *thought* to functionally communicate *thoughts*, which are the products of intellectualism. As a form of personal communication, Newspeak is spoken in staccato rhythm, using short words that are easy to pronounce, so that speech is physically automatic and intellectually unconscious, by which mental habits the user of Newspeak avoids critical thinking.

The intellectual purpose of Newspeak is to make all anti-IngsoC thoughts "literally unthinkable" as speech. As constructed, Newspeak vocabulary communicates the exact expression of sense and meaning that a member of the Party could wish to express, while excluding secondary denotations and connotations, eliminating the ways of lateral thinking (indirect thinking), which allow a word to have additional meanings. The linguistic simplification of Oldspeak into Newspeak was realised with neologisms, the elimination of ideologically undesirable words, and the elimination of the politically unorthodox meanings of words.

The word *free* still existed in Newspeak, but only to communicate the absence of something, e.g. "The dog is free from lice" or "This field is free of weeds". The word could not denote free will, because intellectual freedom was no longer supposed to exist in Oceania. The limitations of Newspeak's vocabulary enabled the Party to effectively control the population's minds, by allowing the user only a very narrow range of spoken and written thought; hence, words such as: *crimethink* (thought crime), *doublethink* (accepting contradictory beliefs), and *IngsoC* communicated only their surface meanings. In the story of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the lexicologist character Syme discusses his editorial work on the latest edition of the *Newspeak Dictionary*: „By 2050 earlier, probably -- all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron -- they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be. Even the literature of the Party will change. Even the slogans will change. How could you have a slogan like "freedom is slavery" when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking -- not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.”[12]

3. WRITING AS AN ACT OF REBELLION

In Orwell's novel *1984*, Winston decides to write a diary and the writing represents the first act of his rebellion. Just marking the paper by placing a (debatable) date at the top of the page was a rebellious act. Winston is driven by the need to put on paper the continuous restless monologue that has been playing out in his head for years. Although he is aware that what he is doing can have fatal consequences, Winston is determined to leave a testimony to the future, although the possibility of communicating with the future, which tries to gain control over the present by revaluing the past, is deeply problematic.

The struggle burns inside him to destroy everything that has made the totalitarian order, all beliefs, illusions, in short, the identity of the "personality" shaped by totalitarian norms. Writing is there as the final attempt to think alone, faced with the impossibility of waking up alone and surviving. The writing will not help him survive, but still it is the only way of survival for him at that moment. Despite the tragedy of human existence in a totalitarian regime that suppresses any individual thought, Winston continues his own search for meaning. Although his act of rebellion ends in failure, his attempt to leave a written record of what happened in London in 1984 and thus expose the core of totalitarianism represents the only possible form of resistance as long as there is even the slightest chance that man, if nothing else, possesses at least those few "cubic centimeters in his head". Winston's writing represents a radical fight against the totalitarianism, or against the evil which Kafka spoke about, embodied in the administrative which strives to diminish the everything particular, individual, private.

In 1942, Albert Camus wrote the following lines: "If it seemed to me that the world made sense, I would not write." [13] Literature, begins with a man and returns to man and, wherever it goes, it is always according to human measure because it is either a consolation for the man himself or a call to rebellion and action. Consequently, we can draw the conclusion that the connection between language and reality is also the connection between language and social order. And since language is the tool of the prose writer, writing is therefore a way to participate in the creating and perceiving social order. Furthermore, since, according to Sartre, man "enlightens" himself as a thinking being precisely through language, and thus becomes aware of the possibility of freedom, writing should be an act of engagement for freedom of self and others.

Writing, once defined as an act of change and discovery, is also presented as the writer's responsibility towards people, a responsibility that consists in acquainting everyone with the world, so that no one can consider himself innocent. As it is evident in his literary work, Sartre sees writing as a method of communicating the truth about the world and man, and among other things, that part of the truth that concerns personal responsibility in granted freedom. Similarly, writing for Winston is not only the way to find consolation or get at least temporary relief from the horrors of gloomy reality, but the way of its redefining in the attempt to reach to the very core of the totalitarian attempt to extinguish everything personal, not only the emotion, but every thought that could represent possible danger to oppressive regime.

4. CONCLUSION

Language has the exclusive ability to shape the behavior and learning of its users [14]. Lupyan and Bergen emphasize that there are specific distinguished forms of expression that constitute the basics of the language and it solely programs human minds. They also empirically argue that language major focus is on molding the functions of human mind [15]. Berkes argues that language develops to be mind control tool as well as its crucial goal which is the destruction of imagination and will [16]. One of the major themes presented in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is using language to control minds..

1984 shows that language is one of many human tools, but also one of the most important ones. With language, we can develop society and built civilization. It also can be abused, used not to communicate but to confuse, not to build but to destroy, not to lead but mislead, not to clarify but to obscure. Moreover, language is a unique tool that is not used simply to communicate but also to apprehend and even to give shape to reality.

Totalitarian regimes of the 20th century showed that control of the language is one element in maintaining control over the people. Deprived of an adequate complement of words, the people are unable to express thoughts contrary to the standards imposed on them and become helpless and easily managed. Even if they are unhappy or dissatisfied with conditions, they are unable to put that discontent into words, much less actions. Control is more easily maintained at the linguistic level than through police repression and brute force.

Therefore, it is crucial for people to become aware of the importance of being able to express themselves in an articulate and fluent manner, to cherish and nurture the immense and vast richness of their language and vocabulary, not to only exhibit their education or intellectual superiority, but to be able to articulate the deepest emotions and thoughts as well as to be able to (re)think its adequate use in the context of individual, social and political relations. Orwell warned us about the abuse of language not only by media and totalitarian regimes, but also by our own acceptance of giving up on our own efforts to understand ourselves and others by effectively communicating our ideas, wishes, thought, hopes and prospects for the future. By pointing out possible ways of distorting reality by distorting the language, Orwell emphasized the connection between the thinking process and language creativity and use, making us aware of the importance of metacognitive aspects and warning us about the dystopian prospects of neglecting the vast possibilities of language (ab)use in limiting individual creativity and freedom.

One of the significant features of *1984* is the intertextuality that exists between Orwell's novel and the works of Anthony Burgess, Clifford Simak, but also the works of our authors, such as Ljubiša Jocić, Borislav Pekić and Mirjana Novaković. [17] This dialogism is noticeable in the mutual communication of literary discourse in the novels *1984*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *City*, *U zemlji Arastrata*, *Besnilo*, *Atlantida*, *1999* and *Johann's 501*. By combining a high artistic form and the topics typical for so-called trivial literature, the authors of these novels emphasized the fact that there is no a theme that a perfect artistic form could not introduce into literature. Therefore, under no circumstances should language and literature be considered and analyzed regardless of their social engagement, as a significant element of experiencing and transforming the world in which we live.

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