

“In both Orwell’s ‘1984’ and Burgess’ ‘A Clockwork Orange’, a new form of language is created and utilised. The linguistic choices convey much about power and society in the novels. How far do you agree with this interpretation? ”

The revolutionary languages used in the novels are clearly indicative of the mentalities amongst the population and the attitudes of those in power. ‘1984’s *Newspeak* is the product of an authoritarian regime where all chance of revolutionary and challenging thought has been abolished due to the elimination of controversial terms. On the other hand, ‘A Clockwork Orange’s *Nadsat* is the result of teenage anarchy and lack of government intervention, inspired by real life teenage slang which was used to challenge authorities. In this aspect, the novels are complete opposites, as the linguistic choices are predetermined by the state of society and the forces in power, which range from strict authoritarianism to virtual anarchy. In both cases, linguistic choices play a key role despite the thematic differences.

‘1984’ is a classic example of linguistic determinism and relativity under attack by the forces in power. The Party replaces Modern English with a new language called ‘*Newspeak*’, aimed at cutting down the language as much as possible. This, according to Orwell <sup>1</sup>, disables citizens from revolting against the oppressive government because the words used to revolt no longer exist ‘a heretical thought ...should be unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words’. This is what the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis<sup>2</sup> postulates: that different language patterns result in different thought patterns, leading language to restrict thoughts, which is clearly seen in the novel. For example, the concept of freedom has been eradicated over time and any words connoting revolution do not exist. For Orwell however, the restriction is mutual ‘*The English language becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts*’<sup>3</sup>. This could be seen to be present in the novel in terms of political loyalty. *Newspeak* only allows for and emphasises the importance of the Party, so people are more likely to become faithful followers, and therefore use *Newspeak* to do this. Thinking and speaking in *Newspeak* would also bring you closer to the Party, as the words used are subliminally linked to the Party’s ideology and move you away from any contradictory ideas.

Linguistic philosopher Wittgenstein supported this theory. He considered that language is inextricably connected with our everyday lives and any alteration to it could create philosophical problems, such as taking language from its normal setting and into a ‘metaphysical environment’. This happens in ‘1984’, where language is no longer a basic communicative tool and serves as something much more complex: it is being placed in ‘*frictionless ice*’<sup>4</sup>, where the conditions are ideal to serve the Party and yet language, because of the lack of friction, has no actual meaning. The setting is so artificial that the words do not signify anything. Language is dehumanised, just as philosopher Ortega y Gasset proposed<sup>5</sup>. All human elements are stripped away from it, making it an emotionless, artificial and purely political tool.

There is, to a certain extent, linguistic determinism in ‘A Clockwork Orange’ too, although this time it is seen from a different perspective. We see how with *Nadsat*, there is an abundance of words for body parts: ‘*groodies*’ (breasts), ‘*rookers*’ (arms and legs) and ‘*zoobies*’ (teeth), which play a very significant part in the novel, being the victims of Alex and his ‘*droogs*’ violent actions. Therefore, their behaviour has an impact on the language used

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell ‘Essays’: ‘Political and the English Language’ p. 358, Penguin Classics

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapir-Whorf\\_hypothesis#Fictional\\_presence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapir-Whorf_hypothesis#Fictional_presence)

<sup>3</sup> George Orwell ‘Essays’: ‘Political and the English Language’ p. 349, Penguin Classics

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig\\_Wittgenstein#Philosophical\\_Investigations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Wittgenstein#Philosophical_Investigations)

<sup>5</sup> Ortega y Gasset ‘The Dehumanization of art and Ideas about the Novel’

because they feel the need to expand on corporal terminology. This is a central part of their acts and it conveys the brutality and rebellion present in society. In '1984' however, mentality rather than physiology is fragmented.

*Nadsat* is fundamentally English, with some transliterated words from Russian. The word *Nadsat* itself is the suffix of Russian numerals from 11 to 19. The suffix slurs the Russian words for 'on ten', for example, 'one-on-ten,' 'two-on-ten,' and so on, therefore forming an almost exact linguistic parallel to the English '-teen.' Many words are Slavic in origin, although surprisingly, Russian readers would have more trouble deciphering the language than us. For example, 'Horrorshow' comes from 'kharashó', the neuter form of the Russian word for good. There are also many puns, like using 'cancer' for cigarettes and 'sinny' for the cinema, <sup>6</sup>both of which appear to be a satirical comment on the degenerated society, which relies on simple pleasures.

The fact that the teen language has no abstract words is perhaps Burgess' reflection on the shallowness of the juvenile delinquent thought processes. They are not interested in subliminal political messages like the Party is in '1984'. Instead, their language is spontaneous and direct, just like their actions. Language serves as a vivid portrait of their interests and motivation. The possibility of the creation of *Nadsat* reflects how little political control there is, as the government is not alarmed by the violent ramifications of language and allows for new forms of language to flourish, something which would never happen in '1984', as society in Oceania is under strict control from the Party.

George Orwell criticises the decline of political language, stating that, essentially 'all political writing is bad writing'<sup>7</sup>. Words are no longer chosen for their connotations but for their meanings and aesthetic value within a phrase. The politicians who use them, as seen in '1984' by the Party, adapt the meanings themselves. Paradoxical euphemisms are used, for example, when a concentration camp becomes a '*joycamp*' and a ministry that deals with war is named '*Minipax*', which is peace in Latin. This shows that Orwell uses an ancient language to create futuristic meanings for Newspeak words. It is also a paradox because 'peace' and 'war' are opposing terms so the written word contradicts its true meaning. The image of Big Brother is also carefully designed because initially, the idea of a 'big brother' can convey feelings of comradeship, unity and protection. However, he is actually the evil dictator in the novel, who professes those ideas but contradicts them with the actions of the Party. By choosing contradictory terms, Orwell is reflecting the decadence of political language at the time when he wrote '1984' and this is transported onto the novel through *Newspeak*.

The three categories of *Newspeak* in '1984' exemplify linguistic determinism because they are used as linguistic weapons. Just like *Nadsat* has abundant terminology for body parts, *Newspeak* flourishes with restricting, manipulative political terms. The B vocabulary is political and C vocabulary is scientific and technical; only A vocabulary remains for everyday terms and even here, word meanings have been strictly limited.<sup>8</sup> This last category is the one that has been less affected by governmental censorship. Common words like '*dog, tree, and sugar*' remain but we find that their meanings have been fixed and that they cannot be used for political reasons. Vocabulary B encompasses words that have been carefully designed for political use, '*intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them*'<sup>9</sup> such as '*thinkpol, goodthinker, sexcrime*'. Other words like '*free*' have had their meaning altered and are now devalued of heretical connotations. It can

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<sup>6</sup> Blake Morrison 'Introduction to 'A Clockwork Orange'', p. 18, Penguin Classics

<sup>7</sup> George Orwell 'Essays': 'Political and the English Language' p. 358, Penguin Classics

<sup>8</sup> George Orwell '1984' Appendix: The Principles of Newspeak p.312, Penguin Classics

<sup>9</sup> George Orwell '1984' p. 316, Penguin Classics

only be used when saying *'that dog is free of lice'* but not in terms of the concept. Words like *'honour, justice and democracy'* have simply ceased to exist. Finally, the C vocabulary is made up of supplementary terms and consists entirely of scientific and technical terms, which are hardly used in everyday speech or in political speech. There was, for example, no word for *'science'*, as Ingsoc already covered any possible meaning.

The extreme opposing view to linguistic determinism, that language has absolutely no influence on thought, has been discredited and even Whorf himself never defended his theory strongly; it was only considered a theoretical construct employed as a foil.<sup>10</sup> The current common view is that the link between language and thought is only moderate and current linguistics study *how* it affects thought rather than if it does at all. Experimental data has not been able to either support or discredit the hypothesis.<sup>11</sup> John J. Stinson, comments in 'Anthony Burgess Revisited' that language, instead of representing the graphic reality of Alex's world, serves as a shield for so much violence. This means that *Nadsat* is not completely accurate in depicting society's actions. According to him, we are led to have contradicting views of the actions described due to the language used. Readers *'come to have ambivalent feelings only when their moral reactions, linguistically stupefied into unwatchful-ness, suddenly rouse themselves and come up panting indignantly,'* meaning that, on a superficial level, when we simply read the words, we are not fully aware of the horror they describe due to the language used, which partially covers up reality and disables us from thinking morally. It is only when we overcome the language barrier and start thinking consciously about it that we start judging their actions morally and this requires us to think beyond the written words.

In terms of Orwell's writing in '1984', he uses straightforward, basic language to contrast with the fakeness of *Newspeak*. In his essay 'Politics and the English Language', Orwell considers that ornamental language is a sign of insincerity that leads to misunderstanding *'one almost never finds in them (political dialects) a fresh, vivid home-made turn of speech'*, hence his clarity in the novel. This aspect has been criticised by those who consider his style to be overly dry, but it is essentially what Orwell consciously decided to use. He even created a set of rules which justify his writing style: *'Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print, never use a long word where a short one will do...'*<sup>12</sup>. Ben Pimlott<sup>13</sup>, considers that, although it is Orwell's lucidity with language that makes the novel so accessible, it is also partly due to *'a lack of subtlety in his characterisation, and a crude plot'* and that his narrative *'lacks development.'* However, Orwell sticks to his personal style throughout: He detests *'dying metaphors'* and hardly uses them, criticises pretentious diction and avoids using complex words when simpler ones can serve the same purpose<sup>14</sup>. Simple language is necessary in the novel, no matter how basic it is, in order to contrast with the political fakeness of *Newspeak*: Orwell's writing denotes honesty; *Newspeak* does not.

Douglas Kellner, a critical theorist in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, also writes of the degenerating language used in politics. This is depicted in the 'medical treatment' of war by the Reagan administration, who wanted to eradicate the 'cancer' of Communism. They were hiding the reality behind analytical, well-respected terms which people could believe to justify their true aims. In real life 1984, Reagan also named what essentially was his 'war budget' as a 'defence budget', a clear example of something like *Newspeak*. Kellner considers that during the Cold War, both sides invested in Orwellian language to justify their

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<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapir-Whorf\\_hypothesis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sapir-Whorf_hypothesis)

<sup>11</sup> John Lucy, 1992; Gumperz & Levinson 1996

<sup>12</sup> George Orwell 'Essays': 'Political and the English Language' p. 359, Penguin Classics

<sup>13</sup> Introduction to Orwell's '1984' p.18 Penguin Classics

<sup>14</sup> George Orwell 'Essays': 'Political and the English Language' p. 358, Penguin Classics

decisions. The Vietnam War was also a chance to expose this, calling the destruction of villages by euphemisms such as 'pacification program' and the concentration camps 'pacified hamlets'.<sup>15</sup> This new language, akin to *Newspeak* was used to cover up the atrocious reality. In '1984', the Party goes a step further and actually eliminates words completely to remove the chance for rebellion. The language also covers up for the Party's atrocious war acts, with 'triumphant phrases' such as '*very strategic manoeuvre, perfect coordination, half a million prisoners -victory, victory, victory*'.<sup>16</sup> Although the language might be covering up the reality, this is a true representation of the attitudes of totalitarian regimes, showing that language does actually reflect the mentality of those in power. The euphoric language serves as a political euphemism for their actions and also stirs up public support, mobilising the masses and bringing them closer to the Party.

Alteration of language for political purposes was also seen during the Nazi regime. Viktor Klemperer, Professor of French at the University of Dresden, wrote 'The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist's Notebook' in which he investigated the way Nazi propaganda altered the German language to indoctrinate people into Nazi ideas. A form of language similar to *Newspeak* is created and the book demonstrates how the new language came to be spoken by the majority of the population. Examples include '*Nazi, Gestapo, Comintern, Agitprop, Inprecor*', all examples of abbreviations (Nazi stands for National Socialist) used by totalitarian regimes, which mirror the ones used in '1984' such as '*Minutetrue*', which stands for the Ministry of Truth.

The intention of these abbreviations was to '*encourage a gabbling, monotonous style of speech*'.<sup>17</sup> Language becomes a mind-control tool, with the ultimate goal being the destruction of will and imagination. John Wain, English writer, considers that Orwell's vision of the future does not include extinction weapons because '*they do not scare him as much as spiritual ones*'.<sup>18</sup> This shows that the way to control the masses is through their brains, through psychological channels, using language as the catalyst. The population is intellectually weakened as the language becomes weakened because it reflects the decadence of society. Language also reveals the real intentions of the Party: to control the minds, rather than the bodies, as we see in 'A Clockwork Orange', of the citizens of Oceania.

In real life, and also during 1984, the National Council of Teachers of English provided the ironically named 'Doublespeak' awards to the Pentagon's descriptions of war events. Civilian casualties in nuclear war were called 'collateral damage' and peace was 'permanent pre-hostility'.<sup>19</sup> This shows how *Newspeak* has become a natural part of political language in recent years because it helps politicians to hide the truth behind believable yet misleading terminology. Anthony Burgess was also influenced by contextual events; In Russian cities like Leningrad he witnessed the authorities dealing with rebellious teenage gangs. Russia would then go on to deeply influence *Nadsat* and the criminal activities he witnessed would be transported to the novel.<sup>20</sup> We find the origins of *Nadsat* in the teenage slang from real life at the time when Burgess was writing the novel: the 60s. Mods and Rockers both had their idiosyncratic dialects but Burgess wanted to create a language that would endure time.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Kellner 'From 1984 to One-Dimensional Man: Critical Reflections on Orwell and Marcuse'

<sup>16</sup> George Orwell '1984' Appendix: The Principles of Newspeak p.310, Penguin Classics

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Jem Berkes 'Language as the 'Ultimate Weapon' in Nineteen Eighty-Four'

<sup>19</sup> Douglas Kellner 'From 1984 to One-Dimensional Man: Critical Reflections on Orwell and Marcuse'

<sup>20</sup> Blake Morrison 'Introduction to 'A Clockwork Orange', p. 18, Penguin Classics

'A Clockwork Orange's' social and political anarchism is reflected in the language used, Nadsat. It is used by the teen subculture and it is not a written language, unlike *Newspeak*, but rather a transcription of vernacular speech.<sup>21</sup> John W. Tilton, writing in 'Cosmic Satire in the Contemporary Novel', supports and praises Burgess's use of *Nadsat*, saying that he used it 'to assure the survival of the novel by creating a slang idiom for Alex that would not grow stale or outmoded as real slang does.' In 'A Clockwork Orange', Alex's interrogators dismiss his argot as "subliminal penetration"<sup>22</sup> because it has underlying tones of teenage rebellion and violence. The words employed in *Nadsat* sound harsh and bold when pronounced and read, which reflects perfectly the meanings they convey, to do with violent acts.

Burgess chose Alex, the narrator, as the timeless epitome of anarchy and liberty, as a unique representation of the teenage subculture, which was separated from an equally chaotic society. The whole novel pays homage to liberty, even if liberty means ultra violence and rape. It presents a moral dilemma, which leads the reader to ask whether it is better for man to choose to be bad or to be conditioned to be good. Burgess convincingly 'says yes'.<sup>23</sup> We see how, on moral grounds, both novels oppose each other completely, as they both present these two conflicting choices. Whilst in '1984', society is indoctrinated into behaving like perfect political followers, in 'A Clockwork Orange', we find that free choice dominates everyday life, leading to the atrocious acts of Alex and his gang. Burgess however, prefers this to a controlled society although ideally, 'a well-run state will moderate the dangers'.<sup>24</sup>

'A Clockwork Orange' is a novel with a specific message to convey. Like Orwell's '1984', the book warns against the dehumanising effects of an imbalanced government. In terms of linguistics, however, they differ due to the fictional societies they are mirroring. Both novels feature linguistic determinism to a certain extent, meaning that the language used links directly to the thought processes of society. In '1984', *Newspeak* is used to show and spread extreme political control; society has been numbed through the gradual use of the new language, which inevitably drives them towards supporting the Party and their ideology, as there is no alternative. In contrast, 'A Clockwork Orange' uses an inventive, graphic dialect, *Nadsat*, to mirror the equally graphic actions described in the novel which rule society. The linguistic choices therefore do exemplify the mass mentality in both novels (the Inner and Outer Party in '1984' and the teenage subcultures in 'A Clockwork Orange'), because they have been based on the political systems at the time and to a certain extent, the process works both ways: the actions influence the language.

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