

The Linguistic and Sociopolitical Dimensions of Control in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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Abstract: George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* remains central component of dystopian literature, captivating readers with its portrayal of a totalitarian regime where surveillance, censorship, and thought control reign played a supreme role among the society. This paper aims to explore the intricate interplay between language, power, and societal manipulation as depicted in Orwell's masterpiece. Keeping in view of linguistic theories, socio-political analysis, and literary criticism, this research explores how the Party's manipulation of language, illustrated by Newspeak, serves as a mechanism of control over the individual and society at its peak level. Furthermore, it examines the parallels between the fictional world of Oceania and real-life instances of authoritarian regimes, shedding light on the enduring relevance of Orwell's warnings in today's political landscape. Through a comprehensive examination of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel's enduring significance and its implications for contemporary discourse on freedom, surveillance, and the power of language.

Keywords: George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Totalitarianism, Language, Newspeak, Surveillance, Censorship, Dystopia.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a dystopian exploration of a future society where a totalitarian regime, controlled by the Party leader, at every aspect of people's lives. The story is set in the fictional superstate of Oceania, where the ruling Party manipulates language, history, and reality to maintain its authority. The societal context of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is deeply rooted in Orwell's concerns about the rise of totalitarianism during the mid-20th century. The novel reflects his apprehensions about the growing influence of authoritarian regimes, particularly inspired by the rise of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. Orwell was critical of both fascist and communist ideologies, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* serves as a warning about the dangers of unchecked governmental power and propaganda. The novel explores the extreme consequences of a government having absolute control over its citizens, suppressing dissent, and erasing individual freedoms. Adibur Rahman in his book *George Orwell A Humanistic Perspective* rightly observes:

It is the politics of totalitarianism, pacifism, war and regimentation which work as a sweeping force of dehumanization in the society, Orwell exposes the draculean world of totalitarianism where the all-powerful state has the ultimate control over man's consciousness. There are three super states, Oceania Eurasia, and Eastasia which are under a single totalitarian power. These three superstates are self-sufficient but they are at endless war so that the 'proles' may not rebel against the state... (83)

The rulers are willing to the point out the fact that power is the end of all political activity, but this is more in the nature of self-knowledge than in the nature of public admission. They continue to maintain the hypocrisy that political activity is meant for social welfare. Economic injustice is the end of this politically-oriented society. The society is divided into three different classes e.g. the inner party, the outer party and the Proles. The inner party members enjoy specific degree of privacy and can be access all the luxurious products like pure coffee, sugar and wine etc. they are at the top of the social structure and played a role of manipulators, the controllers and creators as well as destroyers among the society. On the lowest extremity are the proles. They are uneducated, large in number, living hand to mouth, working like slaves and procreating like animals. The outer party exists in between these two extremes. They are the equivalent of the middle class. This is the class deprived of all those things, that the inner party members enjoy. This class members are deprived both of the pleasures of the body and of the mind.

Newspeak is the new language of this totalitarian society. And this new language is responsible for the annihilation of the past. It is also a source of perfection and attainment of power in the society. Newspeak consists of three classes of vocabulary, each created for a different purpose. Class A vocabulary contains functional words that are used in routine life and not changed from regular English, the definitions of the words are just more strictly defined. Class B vocabulary consists mainly of political words, some examples include: Minitrue (Ministry of Truth), Minipax (Ministry of Peace), Miniluv (Ministry of Love), Miniplenty (Ministry of Plenty), Ingsoc (English Socialism), Ficdep (Fiction Department), and Pornosec (Pornography Section) etc. Class C consists of all of the scientific and technical terms, like science. Like class A, these words have just been taken from the English language and their definitions have been made stricter. The knowledge of these words is only provided to those in fields that need to use them. Rahman writes, "the totalitarian power of Oceania consists of four ministries which ironically mean falsehood, war, hatred and shortages respectively. In Newspeak, these have been written as miniature minipax, minilux, and miniplenty." (83-84)

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* remains a seminal work in dystopian literature, offering a chilling portrayal of a totalitarian regime where control is exerted through pervasive surveillance, censorship, and manipulation of language. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the manipulation of language is the main central control mechanism governed by the party. Newspeak, a language invented by the Party, aims to narrow the range of thought by eliminating words that could express dissenting or subversive ideas. Winston friend Syme says: "We're destroying words-scores of them, hundreds of them everyday. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won't contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050." (32)

George Orwell created his own language, Newspeak, to represents the worsening effects of free thought and language in societies under authoritarian dictatorships and to explain how language can be used to control and influence the vulnerable. Through the destruction of language, the Party seeks to control the very thoughts of its citizens, ensuring conformity and obedience. Jain opines, "Newspeak... is aimed at destroying the polysemic nature of language, every concept being expressed by exactly one word."(49) Examples of linguistic manipulation abound in the novel, from the renaming of institutions e.g. doublethink- the name of the ministries is rather contradictory as the ministry of truth deals with lies, the ministry of peace with war, the ministry of love with torture, and the ministry of plenty with starvation, and thoughtcrime represents thinking thoughts outside of the party's ideology or agenda. By controlling language, the Party effectively controls reality, shaping perceptions and limiting the possibility of disagreement.

In addition to linguistic manipulation, Orwell's novel depicts a society characterized by pervasive surveillance and state control. The extensive presence of telescreens, microphones, and informants ensures that every action and utterance is monitored, fostering a climate of fear and paranoia. This surveillance extends beyond physical spaces to encompass the private thoughts of individuals, as exemplified by the Thought Police, who punish even the mere consideration of dissenting ideas. Through surveillance, the Party maintains its grip on power, anticipating any challenge to its authority and perpetuating a culture of conformity and submission. As Jasbir Jain opines in his book *George Orwell: Witness of Age*, "in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the ruling class is not only trying to retain power, it is engaged in reversing all emotional and moral norms." (129)

Nineteen Eighty-Four is the world of hopelessness. It is a world where the human sentiments are replaced by mechanical devices. There is only external war and supremacy of the party exists in the society. The party controls everything like thoughts, sensibility, and time. Human beings are no choices for progress. The mechanised men and

women have replaced with the real human beings. There will be no present, past or future objective to be imagined. Everything is gone except the Party, Big Brother, war, and hate.

Censorship and propaganda play crucial roles in sustaining the Party's control over information and shaping public opinion. The Ministry of Truth, responsible for rewriting historical records to align with the Party's narrative, exemplifies the manipulation of truth for political ends. Similarly, the dissemination of propaganda through outlets such as the Two Minutes Hate serves to channel public anger and frustration towards external enemies, deflecting attention from the Party's oppressive policies. Through censorship and propaganda, the Party maintains a monopoly on truth, obscuring reality and reinforcing its authority.

Winston Smith, the protagonist, works in the “ministry of truth” where his job is to destroy and to change the human past memories in the favour of the state. He actually raises a voice against totalitarianism which is nightmarish and irrelevant in nature. He feels his individuality is crushed by the state. He has not the freedom to reveal the facts of concealing and distorting the truth which is committed in such a disguised manner by the state as these things never happen in the state. So, Winston Smith rebels against the totalitarian power governed by the state. He is no longer ready to sell his humanity and morality for the sake of this dystopian world with nightmarish experiences, microphones, rubber truncheons and T.V. screens. Arun Joshi in his book “Fictional Styles of George Orwell” rightly observes, “In the world of telescreens, thought crime, and thought police, it appears that the revolt of Winston will not go for a long time. Sooner rather than later, he will be caught and punished. This will lead to an end of dissent in the world of the Party and Big Brother.” (107) These cruel things are made to expose those individuals who act and even think against the totalitarian power. Orwell writes, “On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHERS IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.” (743) Winston friend Syme a philologist, who works in the Research Department also exposes hypocrisy of the totalitarian states by saying, “Don’t see that the whole aim of New Speak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words to express it.” (773)

While *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a work of fiction, its depiction of totalitarian control and linguistic manipulation holds profound implications for our understanding of contemporary sociopolitical dynamics. Rahman states, “Orwell was, fundamentally, a socialist, but he was a socialist of a different kind...His novels echo a multi-foliate vision of democratic socialism, common decency, liberty, justice and righteousness.” (10) Orwell's warnings about the dangers of unchecked state power, surveillance, and propaganda remain relevant in an age marked by the erosion of privacy rights and the proliferation of misinformation. Moreover, the novel serves as a cautionary tale about the fragility of language in the face of authoritarianism, highlighting the importance of preserving linguistic diversity and freedom of expression.

2. Conclusion:

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* offers a powerful exploration of the linguistic and sociopolitical dimensions of control, depicting a dystopian society where language is weaponized to enforce conformity and suppress dissent. Through the manipulation of language, pervasive surveillance, censorship, and propaganda, the Party maintains its grip on power, perpetuating a climate of fear and oppression. As we grapple with contemporary challenges related to surveillance, censorship, and the erosion of civil liberties, Orwell's novel serves as a timely reminder of the dangers of unchecked authority and the enduring importance of defending freedom of thought and expression.

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