

Uses of Anti-Language in Orwell's Nineteen Eight –Four: A Critical Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

Anti-language is a minority dialect or method of communication within a minority speech community that excludes members of the main speech community. The term anti language was coined by British linguist M.A.K. . . . “An anti- language serves to create and maintain social structure through conversation, just as an everyday language. The present paper examines the techniques of Orwell's use of anti-language in Nineteen Eight-Four to reflect an anti-world.

KEY WORDS: Anti- language, Discourse, Newspeak, Doublethink, Ingsoc.

Language as a symbolic communicative system is fundamentally arbitrary. It uses vocal sounds in particular systems combination to refer to realities (abstract and non-abstract), where there is no inherent logical relationship between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’. For example, the biologically four- legged animal recognized as ‘kutta’ in Hindi is known as ‘kukura’ in Oriya, ‘dog’ in English, ‘hund’ in German, ‘chien’ in French. Language is infinite in the sense that there is no limit to the length of a sentence or to the number of sentences in language. This is referred to as ‘recursiveness’ in language by Chomsky (1965). Language is novel and creative. The notion of creativity implies that the sentences we produce in our communicative behavior are invariably ordinary lives. Even non-repetitive and novel. We function within the intuitive rules of a language, but we use these rules to produce newer sentence in every act of communication in our ordinary lives.

In 1984, the use of ‘anti-language’ is an act of violating normal norms of language for generating unique effects on the audience. Orwell created an ‘anti-language’ in the context of the

novel *1984* reflects an anti-world and the same time sustains it. Orwell has coined a wide range of vocabulary items in the novel in order to convey his sense of horror of a future he apprehended. The number of innovative words in the form of ‘Oceania’, ‘Doublethink’, ‘Thoughtcrime’, ‘Crimestop’, ‘Thinkpol’, and a host of other words. This paper analyzes a few of them and points out their significance in the context of the novel.

‘Newspeak’ is the word for the official language of the Oceanic society where as ‘Oldspeak’ is the language used at the level of ordinary communication and ‘Prolespeak’ is the dialect used by the proletariat. The presence of three varieties of language in the same society, anthropologists and sociolinguists would agree, is expensive of the inequality in power and status prevailing among the different social groups in Oceania.

‘Doublethink’ is the word for telling deliberate lies and genuinely believing in them. The authority indulges in doublethink to deceive the populace about the society’s relation to material reality. The ordinary party workers indulge in doublethink for their survival and safety. Doublethink is thus indicative of the fact that the Oceanian society is based on deceit and self-delusion.

‘Ingsoc’ is the word for ‘English socialism’. This telescoped word does not call up a picture of the history and the complex feelings associated with the socialist movement but simply impresses as a ‘tightly-knit organization and a well-defined body of doctrine.’ It sounds like a familiar concrete object and does not evoke either thought or emotion, as the original pair of words would do. We may say that an effort has been made to neutralize and rather distort meaning. There is a subtle attempt of censorship in the use of this word. Such a canny device is a reliable tool in the hands of the Oceanian bureaucrats to control and mould the thought of the people.

‘Miniture’, ‘Minipax’, ‘Miniluv’ and ‘Miniplenty’ are the official names for ‘The Ministry of Truth’, ‘The Ministry of peace’, ‘The Ministry of love’ and ‘The ministry of plenty’ respectively. These ‘portmanteau’ words carry a sly irony in them. ‘Miniture’ for example, is least concerned with truth and reality. It is pre-occupied with falsification of facts. ‘Minipax’, ‘Miniluv’ and ‘Miniplenty’ do not encourage and advance the cause of peace, love and prosperity of the oceanic people. Rather, they do just the opposite. There is always a deliberate attempt at glossing over facts and reality, and hoodwinking people.

‘Ungood’, ‘doublegood’, ‘Doubleplusgood’ are adjectival words meaning ‘bad’, ‘very good’ and ‘extremely good’ respectively. There is an attempt in the use of these words at reducing the number and variety of the yardsticks of value judgements. The word ‘good’ has been creatively manipulated to convey the meaning of ‘bad’ along with its own. The aim of such reduction in the complexity of the system of value judgement is to show that the people are essentially narrow in their vision and practically limited in their understanding and appreciation of things and phenomena surrounding them.

Phonologically, one distinctive feature is especially noticeable in all these new expressions. There are a few syllabus, usually two or three, with the stress distributed equally between the first syllabus and the last one. The use of these words would, therefore, produce ‘a gabbling style of speech’ characterized by a staccato note and monotony. The result would be that speech is, as far as possible, independent of the speakers. In such circumstances, even the political or ethical judgement of a party member would not be much different from that of an automaton. The implication is that even the active members of the oceanic society virtually transformed into automata without their being conscious of such a process,

Orwell’s neologisms in *1984* are thus not superfluous and decorative. These expressions are not meant merely to stun and shock the readers but to vivify the horrifying picture that the Oceanic society carries and conceals within itself. They expose the cold, orderly and predictable processes of deceit and inverted meaning dehumanization and serve as a sharp tool of Orwell’s satire on the inhuman practice of the totalitarian states.

Let us now talk about Orwell’s use of ‘relexicalizations’ in the novel. ‘Relexicalizations’ may be tentatively defined as reorientations in meaning of the existing words and vocabulary. Linguistically, we see vocabulary items as complexes of binary semantic attributes. What precisely Orwell has done is to negate the presence of certain attributes while bringing in the exact opposites.

Orwell has assigned deviant and inverted meaning to many expressions in the context of the novel *1984*. The three slogans of the party; ‘war is peace’, ‘freedom is slavery’, ‘ignorance is strength’ point out how words like ‘peace’, ‘freedom’ and ‘ignorance’ have lost their conventional values and connotations but have attained negative, rather sinister implications.

‘Creativity’ in literature has ceased to be individual and autonomous but has become collective and mechanized. Similar is the case with ‘solipsism’, which has lost its metaphysical bearing, and associates with the epithets like ‘mass’ and ‘collective’. ‘Learning’, ‘understanding’ and ‘acceptance’ in the context of the novel do not mean intellectual pursuit and perception, but a belief in whatever the authorities claim to be objective and true. ‘loathing’ and ‘adoration’ do not contrast each other from a semantic point of view, but overlap and blur. As in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* and Zamyatin’s *We*, ‘happiness’ has become incompatible with ‘freedom’ or liberty. ‘Sanity’ has become statistical and goes with ‘lack of understanding’.

The world of *1984* may be analyzed in terms of our contemporary political scene. The ‘nuclear weapon’ powers talk of ‘disarmament’ ‘détente’, ‘CTBT’ etc. but their sole purpose is to mislead and deceive the world opinion. These powers are never in favour of forsaking all their nonconventional and nuclear weapons but they only agree to reduce a few missiles. Easing of world tension is never their sincere objective and they simply want a perpetuation of their power base. Likewise, there has been a conscious attempt in the world of *1984* at hiding the misdeeds and perversity of the party through language. ‘joycamp’ in the process, is the euphemism for ‘a forced labor camp’ and ‘prolefeed’ for the ‘rubbishy entertainment and specious news ‘that the party hands out to the masses.’ ‘goodsex’ claims that the physical pleasure and the emotional needs have no place in it. It is sex without love. Ironically, it is also the world for ‘chastity’ or no sex at all. ‘Bellyful’, similarly, does not denote anything related to appetite, but a blind and enthusiastic acceptance of the instructions of the political authority. ‘Memory hole’ is not concerned with remembrance, but the opening of a huge furnace for the waste and irrelevant materials. ‘Orthodoxy’ does not refer to conservative ideas and attitudes but the need not to think at all. ‘bigbrother’ though practically the bully in the world of the novel, is almost rendered a touch of domesticity because of the kinship term ‘o’Brien’, similarly, though a pun on ‘oh brain’ and expressive of a sense of disgust and indignation at the devastating brain behind the inhuman world of Oceania, is ascribed a false appearance of neutrality.

Reliquialization in *1984* thus brushes off the lies and falsities on which the Oceanian authority stands and rules the world of Oceania. That is to say, they bring to mind the picture of a world of inverted and perverse values. The number, 1984, in this context does not merely convey

the name of the year in the immediate future in relation to 1948/49, but transcends itself into a dystopia, a fictional vision of the worst possible place for mankind. One is at once reminded of the world of the witches in Macbeth where 'fair is foul' and 'foul is fair'.

We shall now look at another interesting feature of anti-language, i.e. deviation. The 'newspeak', which is the official language of Oceania, might be considered in terms of creative deviation. Most of its words are neologisms if considered from the standpoint of Standard English, but these words can well be linked to words in Standard English. The discourse looks like a form of telegraphese, without the formal syntax of English.

A glance at the newspeak instruction and its Standard English version reveals that the former does not use articles, prepositions, conjunctions, tense, modality and even punctuation marks. It suppresses the formal relation between different words, elements of the sentences and even between sentences. It does not make any recognizable distinction between a verb and a noun. 'Refs', for example, might be interpreted to mean either of the two. The adjectival 'doubleplusungood' shows how mathematical terms like 'double', 'plus', are added to 'good' the prefix 'un' to eliminate the inclusion in language of a word like 'bad' or any other word of negative connotation. The implication is the attempt in language to get rid of the complexity and richness in thought and ideas. The word 'unperson' with the special meaning attached to it is suggestive of a heinous practice that the ruling bureaucracy takes recourse to in its attempt at annihilating dissidents and unwanted personalities. Another peculiarity of this discourse is that it is designed to be decoded and thus it involves a kind of censorship. The reader tells that a mistake has been made, but it is not revealed who has made the mistake. The reported error has been glossed over and thereby dehumanized in a subtle but foolproof manner.

The sort of creative deviation that we find in 'newspeak' illuminates the hideous nature of the Oceania society. 'newspeak', the discourse of devaluation and particularly of suppression and censorship, is reflective of both the dehumanized and the dehumanizing aspects of the world of *1984*.

Thus, anti-language in *1984* as a whole might be thought of as constituting a 'restricted code' that has been specifically designed to serve a special purpose of the ruling class in the context of the novel. It is particularly suited to reinforcing the already existent power

structure and relationship and is least concerned with any new intra- societal equation. Transmission of new information in the context of ‘newspeak’ is an impossibility. Lexical options predictable and people outside the power base would inevitably be forced to toe the official line of speaking.

The ‘anti-language’ in *1984* reflects an anti-world. The operators of this world are not members of an anti-society in the Hallidayan (1978) sense of term, but the pillars and props of the establishment who want to destroy the normal world order within.

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