

# Language as a Vehicle of Domination: A Totalitarian World in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Smita Sharma & Shivangi Bhatt

## Abstract

Language has always been a mode to control the epistemic reality of the individual and culture. This linguistic phenomenon can be traced to the literary condition in Orwell's signature works *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*. The discursive reality or the reality of intellect is represented in particular signs and symbols which may connote the domination through the process of signification, which is reflective of the structuralist dominance of the master upon that of the slave. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* portrays a futuristic dystopian surveillance state, where Ingsoc (English Socialism) has taken over England. *Animal Farm* deals with the issues brought on by the Russian Revolution and the harsh communist regime that followed an allegorical setting, wherein the linguistic manipulation of the powerful and authoritative leads to corruption and oppression. Modern society is no different from what Orwell imagined in the context of his novels, the misuse of language by powerful people for socio-political gain. The paper delves into the instances where the government brainwashes its citizens through the use of propaganda. The concept develops as a lying narrative that emerges by means of domination of the one in power.

**Keywords :** Communism; Dystopia; Propaganda; Totalitarianism.

George Orwell as a modern intellectual elaborates on language ethnocentrically discussing it as an absolute weapon for controlling the mind. Orwell's quest for totalitarian societies made him question the relation between power and language concerned with recuperating the experience in history. A structure of political representation tied to the notions of proportionality in the two works affirms that totalitarian societies come to fit humans into the categories of machines, purposely replacing the organic

with the inorganic, thereby creating synthetic sensitivity by eradicating all that may launch colonial hyper-nationalism and individual inclination. In "Politics and the English Language", Orwell equates the provocative strategy evinced in the novellas in the following terms "If thoughts can corrupt language, language can also corrupt thoughts." According to him the association between corruption and totalitarianism is defined by distorted events, self-image and the concepts shared deceptively. The simultaneous coding of information plays with the inner picture of the eventual happening. Mapping of the mode of domination linguistically can distinctly be traced in George Orwell's two major works: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, which stand out as the best instances of withering critiques of dictatorship. Both represent the setting of the Soviet Union as allegories. They both discuss the Russian Revolution and Stalinism. The vocabulary of English has also been greatly influenced by Orwell. With newer successes of propaganda employing the high-tech style ingraining daily into our linguistic patterns, the pollution of language that was one of Orwell's compulsive concerns has penetrated deeper in his works.

"Language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes." George Orwell rightly said this in his essay "Politics and the English language" but if one wants to manipulate or control people's thoughts for hidden political agendas it works as a powerful tool. Orwell used language as a political weapon in the totalitarian world he created in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Language is used as a means of propaganda as well as thought control in both his works; whether it was endlessly repeated slogans or displacements of one kind of news by another we see it all in his above-mentioned works.

*Animal Farm* (1945) is a satirical allegory that begins with the Major, an old boar sowing the seeds of a rebellion in the mind of farm animals and planning to turn out the owner of the farm Mr. Jones. Major makes the animals aware of the abuse and exploitation they endured at the hands of their human owner in his provocative speech to them during a late-night meeting. In his speech, language is used as a powerful medium by addressing the animals as 'Comrades', a word that reeks of a rebellion, by giving them the slogan 'All animals are equal' and by giving them the song of the rebellion 'Beasts of England'. The words used in the song gave hope to the animals, 'of the golden future time', of the time when they will be their own masters and will be free from rings, harnesses, and whips of man. The singing of the song threw the animals into the wildest excitement and they were all ready for the rebellion. The eloquence of the major and the provocative slogans stirs the animals. It encourages them to envision a bright future

filled with liberty, respect, and equality. The insurrection was quickly put down, and Napoleon and Snowball, two young, capable boars, came forward to shoulder the management and leadership of the farm. The principles of Animalism were reduced to 'The Seven Commandments' which were painted on the wall of the farm to form an unalterable law that all animals must abide by. With the passage of time, these commandments were not only violated but also routinely altered by the pigs for their own selfish motives. Each of the Seven Commandments was altered one by one to suit the convenience of the pigs who were the new ruling class. The language was used to continually distort the facts and control the animals. So the commandment which originally was "No animal shall kill any other animal" became "No animal shall kill any other animal without cause." Eventually, the last commandment becomes "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." (103) The animals, which were expertly controlled by Squealer, questioned their own memory and sanity rather than the manipulation of the commandments. The entire course of history was altered during this process, and the subsequent generation only had Squealer's facts and numbers to compare with the present.

Orwell frames his characters with specific traits which later help the characters achieve their political motives. Napoleon is described as a large, fierce-looking boar 'with a reputation for getting his own way', Snowball however, is seen to be more vibrant and 'quicker in speech.' They are assisted by a little plump pig named Squealer who "was a 'brilliant talker' and could 'turn black into white' with his brilliant speech. There is also Jones's favourite pet Moses, the raven who is a clever talker and a tale-bearer who always entices animals to a magical Sugar Candy Mountain, the place of everlasting spring. Other than this, there was the naming of the battle, decorations and slogans to make the Rebellion seem convincing and to use the enthusiasm of the animals for controlling them. With the lapse of time, the euphoria of the rebellion declines and discrimination, falsehood, treachery and terror set in. A showdown between two rival leaders culminates in one of them being forced to flee for his life. The start of the terror rule and the betrayal of the revolution are signalled by Snowball's deportation. When several animals are accused of treason, treachery, and numerous other terrible offences in cooperation with Snowball, the betrayal of the revolution reaches a crescendo. A string of confessions and executions followed. There were trials and purges here, just like during the Russian Revolution. Additionally, people who battled valiantly were branded as traitors while animals who had never fired a shot were celebrated as heroes. The representative of the pigs, Squealer later explains to the animals how the executions were necessary for the

completion of the Rebellion. He tells them that their longing for a better society at the beginning of the rebellion has reached its completion and the better future that they had hoped for has finally arrived. The leader of the rebellion 'Comrade Napoleon' is awarded with battle decorations such as 'Animal Hero, First Class' and a song is also written in his praise and inscribed on the wall of the farm. Finally, the brilliantly beginning animal revolution crumbles and the name of the farm which was changed to 'Manor Farm' at the beginning of the revolution is changed to 'Animal Farm' once again.

Satyabrata Das in his book *George Orwell: The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* mentions that "*Animal Farm* with its theme of continual misrepresentation, alteration and distortion of facts.....clearly looks forward to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (81). Jones, the human dictator, was only in charge of the action, but the pigs with their clever speech, falsification of the past, and distortion of facts went further by controlling even the thoughts of animals. As Orwell reiterates the idea, "Political language.....is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind". Squealer with his quick wit and brilliant talking not only justified all the animals on the farm but was also responsible for false propaganda. He produced false reports and figures about the increase in food production and the general well-being of the farm. The animals, though aware of the conditions, had no reason to disbelieve him as there were no previous figures to compare them with. In a totalitarian world, it is important to constantly manipulate thoughts and language is a powerful medium to do so.

The atmosphere of Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* shares experiences of the Spanish Civil War as a major influence on how eternal war and horror were presented in Oceania. The two most "sinister and malignant" methods of restricting individual liberty were "Newspeak" and "Doublethink." Winston Smith, the novel's main character, was tasked with changing historical records and news accounts to support the ruling party's stance. As a result, it was no longer possible to identify what was true and what was fraudulent. There were no more records available for evaluation. In order to deny the future, the past was eliminated. Everything was murky and ambiguous because the objective truth had been removed and the history had been distorted. That helped to control the thoughts of people. The purpose of Newspeak in Oceania was not to express meanings but to destroy them. The four ministries of Oceania were called "Ministry of Truth," "Ministry of Peace," "Ministry of Love," and "Ministry of Miniplenty," and they were in charge of maintaining law and order,

economy, news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts. The party's three catchphrases were: "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength". (25) The names of the four ministries were misnomers as their purpose was totally contradictory and so were the slogans of the party. The four ministries ironically mean falsehood, war, hatred and shortages whereas in Newspeak these were written as Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv and Miniplenty respectively.

Alok Rai in *Orwell and the politics of Despair*, agrees that "Language is one of the key instruments of political domination". (122) The matter of language is central to the 'suffocating tyranny' of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Language is used for the totalitarian control of reality. "Newspeak, the language of Orwell's nightmare, is both jargons of dialectical materialism and the verbiage of commercial advertisement and mass media." (119) The intention of Newspeak was to constrict the mind's potential. When it had reached its full potential, there wouldn't be any thought crimes since there wouldn't be any words with which to express them. "The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak." (1984, 51) Language is a means to express one's thoughts in any society. The Inner Party at Oceania was developing Newspeak to control the thoughts of the citizens. The Inner Party was eliminating words and phrases to narrow the range of thoughts of the citizens of Oceania. Eventually, it would become impossible to think of unorthodox thoughts. This language was the non-violent means of maintaining power in a totalitarian state. In his essay "Politics and the English language", Orwell gives some examples of such use of language for political purposes. He says "political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness".

A language such as Newspeak when fully developed and established as the only mode of discourse within a society, will create a society that is corrupt and irredeemable. The Inner Party at Oceania was developing Newspeak to control the thoughts of the citizens. In his essay "Literature and Totalitarianism", Orwell writes about how the totalitarian state controls individual consciousness, as mentioned by Adibur Rahman in *George Orwell-A Humanistic Perspective*. Orwell believed that Totalitarianism abolishes freedom of thought to maintain control over individuals. It refrains you from thinking a certain way as well as expressing it. It establishes a code of conduct: an ideology for you, attempts to control your emotional life, and defines what you must think. The Inner Party at Oceania was trying to set up a code of conduct for the citizens of Oceania in the same manner. That was the whole purpose of Newspeak. The lesser the words,

the lesser will be the thoughts and even lesser consciousness as only consciousness could break the Party into pieces. Orwell thus demonstrates how language may be used to exercise control in a totalitarian society. The Inner Party was eliminating words and phrases to narrow the range of thoughts of the citizens of Oceania. Eventually, it would become impossible to think of unorthodox thoughts. They also entrapped the common man by the use of slogans such as 'War is Peace' and 'Freedom is Slavery'. Language does have an impact on people and the Inner party at Oceania used this fact to manipulate the thoughts of the citizens. As Orwell says, "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink."

Robert Hudson and Edwin Arnold in *George Orwell: A Critical Study*, agree that "Provided the citizen of the totalitarian state has no rebellious instincts at the start, the discipline of totalitarian linguistics can do by non-violent means what the instruments of the torture chamber do by violent ones." (84) The principles of Newspeak, which were outlined in Nineteen Eighty-Four, including condensed words and phrases, were one of the distinguishing characteristics of political language, and the desire to employ such words was most pronounced in totalitarian governments. It was Syme's responsibility to not only condense words but entirely delete them at the Ministry of Truth's Records Department. At some point, the inner party of Oceania will have drastically reduced the possibilities for thought, making it hard to even consider unconventional ideas. They further reiterate that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is primarily about the 'erasure of personality' through the manipulation of language.

Concluded thus, language acts as a vehicle of domination in the politics of totalitarian governments. Instead of using language as a natural growth it is used as an instrument to control and dominate the thoughts of individual and society as a whole. This whole exercise of domination through language is executed in a manner that the individual is not even aware of the fact that he is being manipulated and he sometimes questions his own intellect. Even if he realizes the falsification of facts or the manipulation through language he has no past narrative to compare it with. The reiteration of pseudo justice and fairness further serves to eradicate memory from the minds of people.

**Works Cited :**

- Arnold, Edwin, and Robert Hudson. *George Orwell: A Critical Study*. Anmol Publications, 2005.
- Das, Satyabrata. *George Orwell: The Man Who Saw Tomorrow*. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996.
- Kearley, Susie. "George Orwell's 6 Rules for Good Writing." *Medium*, The Writing Cooperative, 21 Apr. 2022, <https://writingcooperative.com/george-orwells-6-rules-for-good-writing-c7aeaab958b>. Accessed on September 10, 2022.
- Makin, K. *Nineteen Eighty-Four, by George Orwell: A Study Guide*. Guidelines, 1990.
- "Manipulation of Language as a Weapon of Mind Control and Abuse of Power in 1984." *Welcome to Rocio's blog!!*, <https://rorueso.blogspot.com/2010/10/28/manipulation-of-language-as-a-weapon-of-mind-control-and-abuse-of-power-in-1984/>. Accessed on September 9, 2022.
- Orwell, George. *Politics and the English Language*. Penguin Classics, 2013
- Rahman, Adibur. *George Orwell: A Humanistic Perspective*. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002.
- Rai, Alok. *Orwell and the politics of despair: A critical study of the writings of George Orwell*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.