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Newspeak and the Language of the Party

Newspeak is a fallacy, and Orwell knows it. There is a myth about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to the effect that Orwell predicts a future in which thought can be controlled by an artificial language. Although, as we have seen, Orwell does understand that there are vital relationships between language and thought, and he does believe that clear thought can be helped or hindered by language choices, he does not suggest that orthodoxy can be imposed by a government-controlled invented language. In fact, the tone of the Newspeak Appendix—which I suspect is rarely read carefully, or not in the context of the other styles of the novel—is quite clearly satirical, more reminiscent of Swift than anything else in the book. Newspeak seems rather to be presented as the implausible fantasy of an overconfident regime. We will return to these issues, but first let us examine the critique of the political and bureaucratic language usages that are actually represented in the book.

What might be called the language of the Party is manifested in a number of interrelated varieties which are described, referred to briefly, or quoted; as usual in this novel (cf. Cockney), the actual amount of speech in the category is small, but the samples are strikingly exaggerated parodies, hence memorable. There is political oratory, for instance Goldstein (pp. 15–17), the style of Big Brother (p. 44), and the orator in Hate Week (pp. 160, 161). There is what Orwell calls ‘Duckspeak’, evidenced not only in

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public announcements such as the victory announcement on the telescreen, pp. 255–6, but also in the canteen ‘conversation’ of an anonymous Party member (pp. 48, 50–1). There is the lying optimism of the ‘News’ (p. 54). There is the ‘hybrid jargon of the Ministries’ illustrated in the instructions Winston receives at work (pp. 37, 42) and in a memorandum dictated by O’Brien (p. 150). Finally there is Newspeak itself, said not yet to be spoken by Party members as a whole language (as opposed to the use of Newspeak words within English), but used for editorials in *The Times*. Winston can write Newspeak, but it is not illustrated as such in the main body of the novel, though the ‘jargon’ consists almost entirely of Newspeak words.

At this point it is worth recalling the list of faults which Orwell found in official English (Chapter 3, pp. 29–30): *dead metaphors, borrowings, archaisms, jargon, meaningless words, and ready-made phrases*. All will be seen in the extracts quoted below, though there is no space for a complete analysis here. Of Orwell’s six types, the last, ‘ready-made phrases’, is of immediate relevance to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

‘long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else’ (*CE7L*, IV, p. 163).

The stylistic effect of this prefabricated language is conveyed in the account of Goldstein’s ‘rapid polysyllabic speech which was a sort of parody of the habitual style of the orators of the Party’ (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* p. 16), or the speaker in the canteen, ‘someone was talking rapidly and continuously, a harsh gabble almost like the quacking of a duck’ (p. 48), whose phrases ‘jerked out very rapidly and, as it seemed, all in one piece, like a line of type cast solid’ (p. 51). The rapidity and fluency are made possible by the fact that the speaker is simply uttering strings of orthodox jargon and is in no sense choosing words in relation to intended meanings or to some state of affairs in the world. Thus language neither springs from consciousness (the speaker is not thinking), nor has any relation to truth. A striking example of the dissociation of language from thought and from facts is the speech of the orator on the sixth day of Hate Week:

His voice, made metallic by the amplifiers, boomed forth an endless catalogue of [Eurasian] atrocities, massacres, deportations, lootings, rapings, torture of prisoners, bombing of civilians, lying propaganda, unjust aggressions, broken treaties.

In mid-speech he is handed a piece of paper which informs him that the enemy is now not Eurasia, but Eastasia; Eurasia is now an ally:

He unrolled and read it without pausing in his speech. Nothing altered in his voice or manner, or in the content of what he was saying, but suddenly the names were different. (p. 160)

Winston later reflects that:

‘the speaker had switched from one line to the other actually in mid-sentence, not only without a pause, but without even breaking the syntax’ (p. 161).

In a sense then it does not matter what the speaker is saying: his utterances are just an orthodox gesture and in no sense an account of a real state of affairs. It is just automated speech, the utterance of a machine. Orwell analyses the process in ‘Politics and the English Language’:

When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases—*bestial atrocities, iron heel, blood-stained tyranny, free peoples of the world, stand shoulder to shoulder*—one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker’s spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them ... A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance towards turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity. (*CEJL*, IV, pp. 166–7)

Orwell had parodied this kind of speaker some years earlier, in *Coming Up for Air*, when George Bowling listens to a ‘well-known anti-Fascist’ at a Left Book Club meeting:

his voice came across to me as a kind of burr-burr-burr, with now and again a phrase that caught my attention.

‘Bestial atrocities.... Hideous outburst of sadism.... Rubber truncheons.... Concentration camps.... Iniquitous persecution of the

Jews.... Back to the Dark Ages.... European civilization.... Act before it is too late.... Indignation of all decent peoples ...' [etc.]

You know the line of talk. These chaps can churn it out by the hour. Just like a gramophone. Turn the handle, press the button, and it starts. (p. 145)

Here we have the same idea of the political speaker as a machine working without consciousness, and, interestingly, the phrases George catches are excellent examples of the jargon, stock phrases and meaningless words which Orwell attacks in the essay, including one, 'bestial atrocities' which is actually used in the essay. The 'gramophone' metaphor for political speaking is earlier found in *Wigan Pier*, p. 190.

Returning to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell follows the passage from the essay in describing Winston's perception of the speaker in the canteen, even to the metaphor of 'two blank discs instead of eyes'.

it was almost impossible to distinguish a single word ... And yet, though you could not actually hear what the man was saying, you could not be in any doubt about its general nature ... Whatever it was, you could be certain that every word of it was pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc ... Winston had a curious feeling that this was not a real human being but some kind of dummy. It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx ... it was a noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck. (pp. 50-1)

'Duckspeak' may be a suitable Newspeak word for describing the gabbling style (though too humorous and metaphorical for Newspeak really), but the real evil being attacked is conceptual, the idea of speech which issues mechanically without reference to thought or to truth. When, at the end of the novel, the telescreen announces, in Duckspeak, 'the greatest victory in human history' (passage quoted on p. 206 above), or when 'an eager, youthful voice' claims that 'We have won the battle for production!' (p. 54; passage quoted above, Ch. 2, p. 17), the reader knows that it is immaterial to wonder whether this is true or not, and we know that the telescreen announcer is not even thinking about what he says. Orthodox feelings are being communicated and invoked, and that is about all one can say.

A second version of the language of the Party which appears briefly but strikingly in the novel is a clipped bureaucratic jargon, 'the hybrid jargon of the Ministries'. Winston's working instructions are written in this mode:

times 17.3.84 bb speech malreported africa rectify
 times 19.12.83 forecasts 3 yp 4th quarter 83 misprints verify
 current issue
 times 14.2.84 miniplenty malquoted chocolate rectify
 times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusungood refs
 unpersons rewrite fullwise upsub antefiling (p. 37; Oldspeak
 translation of the fourth order on p. 42)

O'Brien dictates into his 'speakwrite' a memo phrased in a variant of this style:

'Items one comma five comma seven approved fullwise stop
 suggestion contained item six doubleplus ridiculous verging
 crimethink cancel stop unproceed constructionwise antegetting
 plusfull estimates machinery overheads stop end message.' (p.
 150)

What we have here are exaggerations of a clipped, bureaucratic style which (ignoring for a moment the Newspeak vocabulary) is familiar in office or institutional practice and also resembles telegrams. There is an absence of capitalisation and punctuation; a fondness for shortening words—'4th', 'refs'—and phrases—'bb' (= Big Brother), 'yp' (= year plan); omission of inflections on the ends of words—'bb's'—and of articles, linking verbs, auxiliaries and prepositions—'*the* suggestion *is* ridiculous', 'refs *to* unpersons'. The style has affinities to the language of telegrams, which is stripped of low-information words to save cost. More specifically, the elliptical style of Newspeak and of the memoranda in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been linked to what was known as 'cablese'; the abbreviated style in which reporters used to send in their stories to the newspapers and radio.¹⁷ The media associations of cablese would have been significant to Orwell given his concern in the novel with the suspect veracity of public accounts of events; and we should note in this connection the notoriously compressed conventional style of newspaper headlines. Insofar as media language is a deformation of language, a deviation from ordinary or demotic speech, it becomes an unclear, unanalytical, representation of reality: the compression of headlines, for example, has an inherent potential for ambiguity or double meaning.¹⁸

It might be claimed that these clippings and ellipses are done for speed and efficiency, or to save space when fitting headlines in narrow newspaper columns, but it is more likely that their function is to *symbolise* speed and efficiency, and power (note that Winston's instructions, and O'Brien's memo,

are packed with verbs of command), on the part of the person who communicates in this abbreviated mode. Let us for a moment pursue the office or institutional association, rather than the media connection, since the texts quoted above are more like office memoranda than news stories. (It should be noted that we need to think about the traditional, pre-information technology, institutional practices which would have been known to Orwell. These have only recently been revolutionalised—but by no means completely—by word-processing, the storage of massive amounts of data on small computers and its ready accessibility—even to managers—, networking, electronic mail, fax, etc. No doubt these facilities have transformed the structure and style of institutional and media communications.) If a manager or head of department scribbles ‘refs pse asap’ on some candidate’s application form before passing it down to the secretary who has to send out for the references, he (more likely a man) is communicating busy-ness and authority: I do not think this style can be used ‘upwards’: a secretary (most likely a woman) would be more likely to address her boss in polite, full sentences on one of those ubiquitous sticky notelets: ‘Mr Brown: would you please confirm that this candidate’s qualifications are appropriate before I send out for her references’. The manager using the brusque abbreviations is requiring the addressee to work out, by reference to institutional conventions, what the full form of the shortened message would be: putting the onus on the inferior addressee. It is the use of a code, and of a code symbolising membership of an élite in-group.

Jargon, in institutional settings, works in the same way; Orwell had already recognised that jargon is a property of (intellectual) élites:

English is peculiarly subject to jargons. Doctors, scientists, businessmen, officials, sportsmen, economists, and political theorists all have their characteristic perversion of the language, which can be studied in the appropriate magazines from the *Lancet* to the *Labour Monthly*. (‘The English People,’ written 1944, *CE7L*, III, p. 43)

The Newspeak words in the orders quoted above are themselves a form of jargon—specialised words in technical contexts, emanating from the powerful who somehow own the register and have the power to make judgement through it: ‘malreported’, ‘malquoted’, ‘doubleplusungood’. There are also ordinary technical jargon phrases in these messages, for example ‘machinery overheads’. If jargon symbolises privilege through specialised knowledge, it also tends to prefabrication: the jargon of a profession is a vocabulary of stock words known in advance of utterance; in

'The English People' Orwell connects it with ready-made phrases, which as we have seen are an enemy of thought. Similarly, jargon can lead to euphemism and lying; and to doublethink. A nice example is 'verify' in Winston's second instruction: he is told to check a 'misprint' in an old edition of the *Times* by referring to the current issue, and restore the truth by correcting the misprint. Reading between the lines, we realise that the December 1983 production forecasts were not fulfilled, so the predictions have to be changed after the event to conform with what was (perhaps) actually produced. Winston's job is 'rectification' (p. 42), a virtuous-sounding jargon word which in fact means the falsification of the official record of the historical past in line with the needs of the political present.

In 'Politics and the English Language' Orwell said that his concern was with language 'merely as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought' (*CEJL*, IV, p. 169, cf. above, p. 33). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* parodies certain varieties of political and managerial language, encouraged by the rulers of Oceania, criticising them on the grounds that—through jargon, euphemism, prefabrication, dead metaphors, stock phrases and the like—they dissociate thought and language, turning the speaker into an unconscious machine that is not expressing thought, and indeed, through the deadness and the purely symbolic character of his language, is prevented from thinking. The skills of doublethink, and the power of Inner Party status, bestow upon O'Brien and on the anonymous source of Winston's instructions a further dimension of language, a manipulative authority which can cause subordinates to assist in the concealment of material reality. So far in these processes, Newspeak figures as an élite jargon symbolising privilege and orthodoxy. But the rulers of the totalitarian society intend Newspeak to have an even more powerful role. It will not simply cloud the truth on the occasions when it is used. When, by 2050, it becomes the sole medium known by members of the Inner and Outer Parties, it will totally shape what they can say and therefore what they can think.

Orwell puts into the minds of the regime an extreme version of the theory which is known in modern linguistics as *linguistic determinism*.¹⁹ Let me say at once that the extreme version, not only as expressed in Newspeak but in any context, is discountenanced by any sensible person and is in any case neither provable nor disprovable; and the extreme version is not proposed by the American anthropological linguists who first discussed the arguments about language determining thought. The theory is usually credited to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, and is more popularly expressed in the writings of the latter. Whorf, a student of native American ('Indian') languages, which seem to be strikingly different from the European tongues, believed that languages could differ radically in their

basic structures, and that these differences could have the effect of 'packaging' reality differently for speakers. Thus, for example, speakers of languages which have different tense systems might possess different mental pictures of the way time is organised. Whorf's arguments are provocatively phrased—he was an amateur enthusiast for language rather than an academic whose way of expressing claims would have to be more formal and cautious. His evidence is anecdotal, and he paraphrases his examples from indigenous American languages to make the point accessible to English readers. The fact that he can translate the exotic, other-reality, material shows that the different world-views are not accessible only to the speakers of the languages concerned. If an English speaker can, through translation, understand the concepts of time encoded in Hopi, and presumably vice-versa, then thought or world-view is not absolutely constrained by the language one speaks. The likelihood is—and this is supported by modern cognitive psychology—that different forms of linguistic organisation (for example different styles or vocabularies) will *dispose* a language user to chop up experience differently, will encourage a *tendency* to see the world in a specifically-slanted way. There is no suggestion that a deliberate organisation of language, like Newspeak, can produce a diminished, fixed and inescapable world-view in its speakers. However, the Newspeak proposal, though extreme and certainly unachievable, is quite closely related to the more plausible claim that language *encourages* a certain view of the world; closely enough to produce a bit of a chill even in readers who see through Newspeak: One has to think twice, and suppress a gut reaction that there is something plausible about Newspeak. This double-take reaction is the effect of the deadpan style of the Newspeak Appendix; the technique resembles the satirical strategy of Swift, whom Orwell much admired (he first read *Gulliver's Travels* at the age of eight).

The reader of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can know a good deal about Newspeak even before encountering the Appendix, through the examples of its vocabulary which occur in the text and through the enthusiastic description given in Part 1, Chapter 5 by Syme, a Newspeak expert working on the Dictionary. Newspeak is a reduced version of English with a small, carefully controlled vocabulary including a number of invented compound words such as 'Minitrue', 'Minipax', 'Newspeak' itself, 'doublethink', 'unperson'; similar compounds in the novel appear to be Newspeak but in the Appendix are not: 'thoughtcrime' appears in the text but is replaced by 'crimethink' in the Appendix. At any rate, the habit of compounding appears to be a structural preference of this variety of English. Neither DUCKSPEAK nor cablese is actually to be equated with Newspeak, though the DUCKSPEAK *effect* is provided for in the Newspeak programme; in the novel DUCKSPEAK is

built on the ordinary political jargons which Orwell criticised in his essays, but in the future it will ideally be produced by polysyllabic Newspeak words. It is important to grasp that no 'pure' example of Newspeak is given in the text of the novel: this absence is covered by the admission that the language will not be completed until 2050, no one speaks it and so far it is used solely for *Times* editorials. The official varieties of English used by bureaucrats and politicians in 1984 are far indeed from Newspeak, though their language is peppered with bits of the vocabulary, even the odd term producing a very alienating effect. The point being made is surely that Newspeak is a long way short of completion.

Syme's account of Newspeak gives an informative succinct account of Newspeak: he stresses the central principle of reduction of vocabulary, the production by compounding of systems of related terms based on the same root—'good', 'ungood', 'plusgood' and 'doubleplusgood' in his example—and the central function of Newspeak, to control thought:

'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak 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. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten ... the Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect.' (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 48–9)

The Appendix's way of putting this is quoted below, pp. 223–4.

Although the general idea of Newspeak can be gleaned from the text of the novel (with also an indication of its essential absurdity, as we shall see), it is only through the Appendix that we fully realise, that Newspeak is designed to be a self-contained linguistic system replacing, not grafted on, the English language. It is organised into three vocabulary categories: the 'A vocabulary' which consists of ordinary words such as 'hit', 'run', 'dog'; the 'B vocabulary' which comprises the political compounds which have already been illustrated from the text; and the 'C vocabulary' which is a supplementary list of scientific terms. The language has its own simplified grammar, its rules for inflection, compounding and suffixing (pp. 259–60). When set out in a 'grammar' in the Appendix, Newspeak has much more the appearance of a complete constructed system than that of a variety of English. It would have been clear to contemporary educated readers with linguistic interests that Orwell's model was the system of *Basic English* proposed by C. K. Ogden in 1930, which drew a lot of

attention in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁰ Basic ('British American Scientific International Commercial') English was designed as an easy-to-learn international English, its simplicity achieved by reduction of vocabulary to an amazing 850 words which, Ogden claimed, could serve to render most meanings communicated normally in the full vocabulary. Like Newspeak, the Basic vocabulary is classified into three categories, two of them with two subcategories. The classification systems do not of course coincide. Orwell seems to have been well informed about Basic, and to have favoured its chance of becoming an international language higher than the artificial languages such as Esperanto and Interglossa. He attributed to it nothing of the negative ideological role which characterises Newspeak, quite the reverse: in one approving comment he suggests that translation into Basic could deflate 'the oratory of statesmen and publicists', 'high-sounding phrases' (*CEJL*, III, p. 244; see also pp. 107–8). So Orwell is not attacking Basic through Newspeak; Basic is used rather as an analogy, an aid to readers to imagine what kind of a linguistic system Newspeak might be.

Note that there is one further major difference between Basic and Newspeak. Basic was designed as a supplementary language existing alongside natural English and with specific in functions; Newspeak is intended to *replace* English as the sole language of Party members, the complete resource they could draw on for all communicative functions. The absurdity of carrying out all our discourse in a very restricted language is palpable.

Orwell almost certainly had in mind a famous parallel absurdity in *Gulliver's Travels*.²¹ In Chapter 5 of Part 3, Gulliver visits the Academy of Lagado, the capital of Balnibarbi. The city and its inhabitants are, like London and the proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in a sorry state:

The next Morning after my Arrival he took me in his Chariot to see the Town, which is about half the Bigness of *London*; but the Houses very strangely built, and most of them out of Repair. The People in the Streets walked fast, looked wild, their eyes fixed, and were generally in Rags. (*Gulliver's Travels*, p. 149)

The buildings and agriculture are ruinous because they are awaiting improved methods of construction and farming to be devised by members of the Academy (a satirical portrait of the Royal Society). The examples of the projects of the academicians which are presented to Gulliver are without exception preposterous and unworkable, such as could be devised only by an intellectual élite out of touch with commonsense reality (cf. the Party in our

novel): extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, building houses from the roof down, dyeing cobwebs by feeding coloured flies to spiders, etc., etc. Two of the projects are linguistic:

The first project was to shorten Discourse by cutting Polysyllables into one, and leaving out Verbs and Participles; because in Reality all things imaginable are but Nouns.

The other, was a Scheme for entirely abolishing all Words whatsoever ... [S]ince Words are only Names for *Things*, it would be more convenient for all Men to carry about them, such *Things* as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on. And this Invention would certainly have taken place, to the great Ease as well as Health of the Subject, if the Women in Conjunction with the Vulgar and Illiterate had not threatened to raise a Rebellion, unless they might be allowed the Liberty to speak with their Tongues, after the Manner of their Forefathers: Such constant irreconcilable Enemies to Science are the common People. However, many of the most Learned and Wise adhere to the new Scheme of expressing themselves by *Things*; which hath only this Inconvenience attending it; that if a Man's Business be very great and of various Kinds, he must be obliged in Proportion to carry a greater *Bundle of Things* upon his Back, unless he can afford one or two strong Servants to attend him. (*Gulliver's Travels*, p. 158)

The reduction of language in the first scheme has some resemblance to the 'clipping' which I pointed out in the style of the 'hybrid jargon' of the Ministry of Truth, and to the merger of parts of speech in Newspeak. The uselessness of the second scheme has a closer relationship to Newspeak. Notice that, like Newspeak, this project is framed in a class distinction: only the 'most Learned and Wise', communicate through 'Things' carried on the back, as the Party members are to use Newspeak; the Lagado equivalent of the proles continue to use their tongues, as the proles retain Oldspeak. It is implied that the élite academicians, anticipating their Ingsoc descendants, are far from 'learned and wise', they are in fact utterly foolish to employ such an unworkable system of communication. Now the real inconveniences of Newspeak, as illuminated by this analogy, are the limitations of a finite system, and the lack of provision for flexibility of meaning. You can only carry so many 'Things' on, your back and in your pockets, and these are bound to be far less than the topics you will want to talk about: real human language is infinitely creative and cannot be replaced by a restricted set of

signs. Equally, meanings in natural language are flexible and abstract, quite unlike the fixity and precision of the academicians' 'Things' or the fixed concepts of Newspeak.²²

These are just two of the fundamental problems which have not been examined by the inventors of Newspeak. If we do not read the bland academic prose of the Appendix too quickly, we will fetch up against other assumptions which have not been thought through properly. Here is the opening of the Appendix, quoted at length to give a reasonable flavour of its style, with tendentious statements about narrowing the language and thought which parallel the account by Syme quoted above:

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English socialism. In the year 1984 there was not as yet anyone who used Newspeak as his sole means of communication, either in speech or writing. The leading articles in *The Times* were written in it, but this was a *tour de force* which could only be carried out by a specialist. It was expected that Newspeak would have finally superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050. Meanwhile it gained ground steadily, all Party members tending to use Newspeak words and grammatical constructions more and more in their everyday speech. The version in use in 1984, and embodied in the Ninth and Tenth editions of the Newspeak Dictionary, was a provisional one, and contained many superfluous words and archaic formations, which were due to be suppressed later. It is with the final, perfected version, as embodied in the Eleventh Edition of the Dictionary, that we are concerned here.

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought—that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. The vocabulary was so constructed as to give an exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and

by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings.
(*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 258–9)

This kind of plain expository language is not found anywhere else in the novel, though it bears some resemblance to the style of ‘the book’ passed by O’Brien to Winston, though that is much more authoritarian and argumentative. This style has no affinity to the more excitable and fragmentary thoughts and speech of the main focaliser Winston, nor to the demotic rhetoric of Orwell himself, as found in his passionately critical essays. The Newspeak Appendix could not be written in the familiar Orwellian voice, for that voice could not refrain from crying that the Newspeak proposal is cynical self-delusion, humbug, swindle and perversion. And this is not an official version issuing from the Party, since it is written in Oldspeak.

Orwell seems to have created a viewpoint which is both distinct from his own persona, and quite outside the world of the fiction. To say that this is the voice of ‘the narrator’ would be a cop-out, for we have seen that there is no distinguishable narrator in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the novel is certainly not narrated in the manner in which the Appendix is phrased. The voice of the Appendix may plausibly be attributed to a new, distinct and anonymous figure with Gulliver-like characteristics: a traveller, or in modern terms an anthropologist or a linguist, who studies a foreign society and its products and reports with apparent objectivity what he sees and hears. Cues to this role include the pronoun ‘we’ used twice in the first paragraph. The first ‘we’ (line six) refers to the writer and his readership: Oldspeak is explained in terms of what it would be called in the ‘home’ culture, somewhat as Gulliver makes Lagado more comprehensible by comparing it to London. This is a minimal cue, but ‘we’ is a demanding word, encouraging the reader to participate by preferring Newspeak to the English of the ‘real’ culture. The second ‘we’, at the end of the paragraph, has a different meaning: it is the impersonal ‘we’ of science, suppressing an ‘I’ which might seem to flag personal intervention inappropriately.

There is no ‘I’ in the text; contrast the writings in the mode of Orwell’s persona, which use it liberally. Overt modality, or judgement from the point of view of the writer, is minimal. It would have been entirely inappropriate to the style for the sentence at the end of the above extract to speak of ‘*ruthlessly stripping*’ words of unorthodox meanings, though that is just the sort of thing Orwell would have said if he had been writing in his own personal voice. Such modal judgements as do occur, for example ‘superfluous words and archaic formations’ and ‘perfected’ at the end of the first paragraph, or ‘proper’ in the first sentence of the second paragraph, or ‘And

rightly so' on p. 264 referring to euphony taking precedence over grammatical regularity, are to be attributed to the sources the Appendix is reporting, and are to be read ironically.

The 'objective' style of science or factual reporting is also suggested, unobtrusively, by a high proportion of passive verbs and by some nominal forms replacing full verbs; both move personal involvement into the background: 'had been devised', 'were written', 'be carried out', 'embodied', 'to be suppressed', etc., and 'communication', 'medium of expression', 'invention'. The nominal style is not taken to extremes, and there is none of the polysyllabic, Greek- and Latin-derived technical terminology which typifies the style of science: the genre of the Appendix seems to be 'objective report' rather than 'science'.

Orwell follows Swift, then, in using a non-judgmental, matter-of-fact style to report a project which to him was not only absurd (displayed in Newspeak 'examples' which are so self-evidently barbarous, fatuous and trivial that illustration is hardly necessary), but worse, philosophically and morally ill-grounded. Showing through the plain style are unanswered and unqualified questions of the most fundamental kind. Philosophically, the proponents of Newspeak take an extreme nominalist position, believing that meanings derive from words, not the other way around. They add to this an extreme determinism—that is, they believe that thoughts are controlled by words. We saw in Chapter 3 that Orwell, like Winston, held the opposite point of view: a fundamental faith in solid objects and in individual thought, and a passionate conviction that language should be used in such a way as to communicate without deception these elemental priorities. Of course, 'realist' and 'individualist' arguments do not get a look-in in the Newspeak proposal, but we would expect that gap; what does come through as irresponsible is the total failure to examine any of the sweeping nominalist and deterministic assumptions that are trotted out in the text, for example, the beginning of the second paragraph.

It is worth adding, briefly, that because the Newspeak project is theoretically ill-founded, it is inherently impracticable. We are bound to wonder how it is proposed to abolish words, how you prevent the remaining words having illicit meanings, how even a regime as powerful as that of Oceania can stop the normal processes of invention, semantic enrichment and natural change. Language is indeed a powerful weapon in the hands of the rulers of an unequal society.²³ However, as Orwell believed and as Winston wanted to believe, it is also an effective instrument of challenge, developing naturally and largely outside the reach of governmental and artificial control. That is why restrictive and prescriptive official bodies such as the French Academy have always experienced an uphill struggle, and why,

fortunately, no deliberately contrived artificial language has ever been successfully established as a natural form of speech acquired spontaneously by the next generation. Planned forms of language like Basic English never catch on; unofficial developments such as the codes of CB radio²⁴ may be short-lived, but have their period of intense significance as yet another challenge to the official monologism of our culture. Winston need not have been so pessimistic.

I think it is characteristic of Orwell's fundamental traditionalism and romanticism that, in the Newspeak Appendix, he lets literature have the last laugh on Newspeak. The natural creativity and the semantic openness, richness and suggestivity of a real language like English are exploited to the full in literary texts. These properties, as we have seen, are quite alien to Newspeak, whose basic drive is towards closure and explicitness. Every centralised nationalist regime needs a Literature to express its ideological essence; but in 1984, the National Literature part of the project looked set to defeat Newspeak:

Considerations of prestige made it desirable to preserve the memory of certain historical figures, while at the same time bringing their achievements into line with the philosophy of Ingsoc. Various writers, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, Dickens, and some others were therefore in the process of translation ... These translations were a slow and difficult business, and it was not expected that they would be finished before the first decade of the twenty-first century ... It was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050.

NOTES

17. Usually cited in this connection is Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937), which Orwell reviewed in 1938 (*CEJL*, I, pp. 368–71). Lyons was a correspondent in Russia for the United Press Agency 1928–34. His book gives an example of cablese, p. 338; samples are printed in Steinhoff, *Orwell and the Origins of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'* p. 169, and Crick, ed. p. 430. To confirm the influence of *Assignment in Utopia* on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, note that Lyons quotes and discusses the formula '2 + 2 = 5' used by the Soviets to sloganise 'The Five-Year Plan in Four Years': see Crick, ed. *Orwell: Nineteen Eighty Four* p. 440 and, for more detail and a quotation from *Assignment*, Steinhoff, *Origins of Nineteen Eighty Four*, pp. 172–3.

18. On the peculiar and reality-changing features of news discourse, see A. Bell, *The Language of News Media* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); R. Fowler, *Language in the News* (London: Routledge, 1991).

19. See B. L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* ed. by J. B. Carroll (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1956); R. Brown, *Words and Things* (New York: Free Press, 1958); H. H. Clark and E. V. Clark, *Psychology and Language* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), chs. 13 and 14; R. Fowler, *Language in the News*, ch. 3.

20. A handy synopsis of Basic, together with a reproduction of the original 850-word vocabulary, is contained in D. Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 356.

21. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* ed. by Robert A. Greenberg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961).

22. Beyond these three comparisons of class-division, lack of creativity, and fixity of 'meaning', the analogy breaks down, of course, and it would be misleading to pursue it.

23. See R. Fowler, R. Hodge, G. Kress and T. Trew, *Language and Control* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); N. Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989).

24. On the jargon of CB radio as 'antilanguage,' see M. Montgomery, *An Introduction to Language and Society* (London: Routledge, 1986) pp. 93–101.