The Viability of Orwell's Newspeak
Through the theory of Saussurean semiotics

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Abstract
Set in the totalitarian society of Oceania, George Orwell's *1984* illustrates how a government can exert complete control over its citizens through surveillance, manipulation, and more central to this essay, language. By employing a structuralist framework based on Ferdinand de Saussure's research on semiotics and the system of language, this essay investigates the viability of Newspeak as a language. It does so by using the aspects of arbitrariness, value, difference, the collective, and mutability to discern to what extent Orwell's Newspeak aligns with Saussure's theory of how languages function. In addition, it looks at how these language changes can be observed using specific examples of the novel. The essay finds that the implementation of Newspeak is entirely reliant on other areas of the government's totalitarian oppression in order to be feasibly implemented, as semiotic theory argues language is a product of the collective and, as such, cannot be constructed by a group of individuals. The essay thus concludes that Newspeak as a constructed language is not viable, as over time, the language will inevitably return to the hands of the collective consciousness, and once that happens, the language will begin to change according to the needs of the linguistic community.

Key words
Structuralism, Semiotics, Saussure, Newspeak, 1984, Orwell, Sign, Linguistic community

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INTRODUCTION

In George Orwell's *1984*, we follow Winston Smith in his life in Oceania and his work at the Ministry of Truth, however, this essay will focus on the on-goings of a different department: The Research Department. Here, several individuals are working to complete the 11th and final version of the Newspeak dictionary. This is to be the final form of Newspeak — the language that will shape the future of Oceania. Whilst the current language of Oceania, Oldspeak, is very similar to the English language of the 21st century, Newspeak aims to be a drastically reduced version of the language in terms of both vocabulary and meaning.

The aim of this essay is to investigate the extent to which Orwell's Newspeak reflects Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and how languages function. It aims to analyse Orwell's *1984* using Saussurean theory of the semiotic aspects of arbitrariness, value, difference, the collective, and mutability to determine whether its implementation would be viable, how Newspeak would function in the linguistic community of Oceania, and what the results would be for the characters of *1984* as part of that community. By comparing Saussure's research on semiotics and the system of language with Orwell's Newspeak using specific examples that illustrate these key concepts, this essay attempts to provide another relevant perspective from which to approach the dystopian classic in its presentation of language.

Before beginning to analyse Newspeak from a Saussurean perspective, a theoretical background must be provided. First, an investigation into previous research on Newspeak and the language of *1984* is made, followed by an overview of structural linguistics and Saussure's semiotics, and a concise explanation of the technicalities of Newspeak. Following the theoretical background is the semiotic analysis of the functions of Newspeak in *1984* through Saussure's aspects as stated above. Using textual evidence from *1984,* it will investigate how the implementation is visible in the novel by looking at the dialogue of characters and the narration. There are some key terms to this essay that will be used in analysing the literature and that the reader should be familiarized with before moving forward with the text.

Semiotics, sometimes referred to as *Semiology,* is an interdisciplinary approach to examining signs or structures in a wide array of fields ("Semiotics"). Saussure was one of the

founders of the theory, which looks at both the meaning of the symbols, but also at how they contribute to the larger structure of language. Saussure maintained that in language, a sign consists of two interconnected parts: the signifier and the signified.

Arbitrariness is the theory that in a symbolic sign, the relationship between signifier and signified is entirely arbitrary (Saussure 67) due to it being decided on by nothing other than the agreement within a linguistic community. In turn, the sign itself is arbitrary in the relationship to its referent. There is nothing in the signified that motivates a specific signifier, or a sign that is motivated by what it is a referent of (Sturrock 35).

The *value* of a linguistic sign, Saussure argues, is related to its place within the system of language, gaining its value through its relationship with other signs and their differences. The value of a word relates to the importance, or insignificance, that we apply to it and what identity we assign the sign (Sturrock 38).

Difference deals with how we understand the meaning of a word. The ability to identify the meaning of a linguistic sign or concept is based around our ability to contrast the *differences* between that word or concept with all other words or concepts (Tyson 213).

The *collective* is what Saussure posits as the linguistic community. It is only the collective that can dictate what we name linguistic signs, and what attributes we assign to them (Saussure 71-74). If the collective finds there is a need that is not being met in the language, they will implement necessary changes to the language.

Mutability is the language's ability to change (Saussure 74). Certain aspects of language, Saussure argues, lends itself to mutability, and others to immutability. Semiotic aspects such as the previously mentioned arbitrariness is one of the characteristics of language that lends itself to mutability by the linguistic community.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND SCOPE OF ESSAY

As a classic piece of literature, *1984* has been analysed and scrutinized for decades since its publication. Not in the least, Orwell's construction of Newspeak has been put under the microscope by many scholars, similar to the purpose of this essay. It has been widely established that *1984*'s Inner Party uses language as a means of oppressing and controlling its citizens, as seen in the research of Courtine, Blakemore, Fowler, Lang, Shippey, and Pool & Grofman to mention a few. Similarly, it is also established that the reduction and changes to the vocabulary is done in a way as to limit the citizens of Oceania's ability to express free

thought — to stop the possibility to think anything other than what is in line with Ingsoc, the totalitarian political system of the country.

Courtine, among others, argues that totalitarian regimes aim to keep people under surveillance and control that is both visible and invisible (70). With Newspeak, this control is the unseen one that is unconsciously establishing itself in the citizens of Oceania. His research argues that the limitations in language will limit the room for the resistance of totalitarian regimes, stating "Power must thus become master of language since language is the living memory of man and offers him a space for inner resistance" (70). Like Courtine, Lang states that "Language, in other words, is a mirror of society and its history" (170-171), arguing that if one can control the language, one can control society. Thus, the control of language is ultimately the final step to a perfected totalitarian power (Courtine 71; Blakemore 349). Blakemore further expands on what the process of the reduction of a language looks like, and argues these changes mean that the Inner Party will never stop working on 'fixing', or rather destroying, the language (354), because the satisfaction of eliminating individual thought will never be fulfilled.

While these conclusions align with the structural linguistic perspective of this essay, their research does not delve into what aspects of Orwell's language ensures that it functions as a means to shape how Oceanian citizens think. Then, this essay aims to investigate what aspects of Newspeak gives language such power, and how or to what extent they align with Saussure's theory of semiotics as to provide a new standpoint of approaching this iconic piece of literature. It will use this research to conclude whether the Inner Party's implementation of Newspeak is viable.

Shippey argues that Orwell's appendix on Newspeak suggests that the relation between words and their meaning are one-to-one correspondences (244). This is, however, not entirely true. Rather, the appendix states that one of the goals of Newspeak is to *create* one-to-one correspondences between words and their meaning by reducing the language. Shippey goes on to state that the true relationship between words and their meaning is a question that remains fascinating, suggesting it is one that is yet to be answered (244). Using the aspects of Saussurean semiotics, this essay strives to fill this gap in research by arguing what this relationship is, how it can be seen in the novel, and how it is acknowledged by the Inner Party in the development of the Newspeak dictionary.

Lang perhaps poses research that is in closest relation to what this essay proposes. Arguing that the language we have available to us will shape our minds and way of thinking (171-172), Lang dabbles in the theory of structural linguistics that suggests that language shapes how we see the world. Thus, as Lang maintains, having a limited vocabulary will limit ones world view because if we lack the means to formulate or think of an idea, it is likely that we also will accept the world for what it is, which in turn is "quite exactly, what a totalitarian system desires and commands from its citizens" (Lang 171-172). This essay aims to continue on the theories presented by Lang by looking at what aspects of language that causes the linguistic system to gain such an important role, or what causes an individual to accept language change or assimilate it into their vocabulary.

Several researchers of Orwell's presentation of Newspeak in *1984* also argue that it is presented in a satirical manner (Courtine 72; Fowler 93; Shippey 233). It is relatively well-known that Orwell borrowed his ideas of Newspeak from C. K. Ogden's "Basic English", an experiment at reducing the English language to a vocabulary of just 850 words (Courtine 72), and that share many similarities with Newspeak. Orwell, who was at the beginning quite interested in Ogden's ideas, "grew disenchanted and turned away" (Courtine 72) from the ideas presented due to drastic disagreements on the purposes of language. It is argued that, when Orwell began writing *1984,* he used Ogden's Basic English and presented it in a satirical and extreme manner in the shape of Newspeak. Whether Newspeak is presented as a jab at Ogden and in a satirical manner, while interesting, is not relevant to this essay, as the focus is not on what Orwell thought of Newspeak, but rather *how* such a language functions through the perspective of Saussurean views on language, and how we can see these aspects at play in the citizens of Oceania.

Whilst Saussure's research is almost a century old, much of his theories hold true today and have become essential to any linguistic study. Moreover, his theories were highly relevant during Orwell's time and when the book was first published, and therein lies the choice to employ his theories for this essay. At a glance, we can observe several similarities between the construction of Newspeak and Saussure's theory, and so it is reasonable to further research what they are, and where they differ. By using Saussure's research on semiotics, this essay attempts to fill a gap in research that examines how Newspeak functions and whether the Oceanian culture would allow for such a language to viably develop. Thus,

this essay will be one among many who analyse Orwell's language, but which aims to do so from the viewpoint of Saussure's ground-breaking linguistic research to provide a new perspective of reading Orwell's *1984* and the ideas of language presented.

STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS, SAUSSURE, AND SEMIOTICS

Our experiences of the world are not *discoveries*, but *creations* of different structures in the human mind, according to structuralist theory (Tyson 214). Structural linguistics grew as a way of studying human cognition and communication. It studied the way meaning is constructed in language and how it differs between cultures. One of its forefathers, Saussure, is considered by many to have provided revolutionary changes to the field of linguistics as a whole (Sturrock 5), not in the least as the creator of the ideas that form the study of signs – semiotics. He moved the field of linguistics from being a strictly philological field of study to the study of languages as they exist now, *synchronically* (Saussure 101), as systems whose structures can be studied in their current state. That is one of the primary goals of structural linguistics: to investigate the very rules that determine what language is and how it functions in our every-day use, the structure of the language as a whole (Tyson 213).

Saussure came to the understanding that we need to study language as a system of structures, where each word has a relationship to another, and how each part, like a word, contributes to the whole language (Tyson 213). The structuralist perspective then brought with it, at the time, a new way of looking at language; by examining the rules that constitute the language, how it is structured, and how each part functions to contribute to the system. Saussure's thoughts on the field of linguistics are expressed in his *Course in General Linguistics*, which was released posthumously by his students (Fry 96).

Some of the revolutionary thinking about language that Saussure birthed was that "language is not a function of the speaker; it is a product that is passively assimilated by the individual" (Saussure 14). In turn, language is never available for the individual to change or dictate, as language is considered a possession of a societal group, never of a single individual. Blakemore further develops this in his "Language and Ideology in Orwell's *1984*" stating that Orwell's novel creates a linguistic ideology based around this theory that humans themselves are linguistic and conceptualizes the world through the language itself (349).

In *The Course in General Linguistics,* Saussure birthed the field of semiotics. Crucial to Saussure was the perspective that words are not just used to refer directly to an object or

abstract idea (Tyson 213). Rather, a word is a linguistic sign consisting of two interconnected parts: the *signifier* and the *signified.* The *signifier* is the *sound-image*, usually expressed through a linguistic item, but which could be objects, gestures, sounds, and images. The *signified* is the concept that the *signifier* refers to. Saussure illustrated this through a simple image (Saussure 67). Above a line, is the concept - the signified. Below the line is a sound-image - the signifier. Together, these coexist and are interdependent. To exemplify his idea, the word "tree", whether written or spoken (apostrophes used to signify the linguistic item, not the object) is the signifier, whereas the tree that we can see, the object existing in the world that we apply the sound-image to, is the signified. Only when the two are combined can they become a word – a sign. This is semiotics in a very simplified sense.

THE TECHNICALITIES OF NEWSPEAK

The Ministry of Truth, whose name like the others is ironic, dealt more so with the constructions of lies than with delivering truths, but its official purposes were delivering "news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts" (Orwell 7). Underneath the surface, however, was an organization working hard to control the conscious thoughts of Oceania's citizens through propaganda. Minitrue, as it was also called, had several different approaches to spreading its misinformation. Most interesting to this thesis, though, is the work ongoing in the Research Department. We are first introduced to this department through Winston's meeting with Syme (Orwell 63) who is working on the development of the 11th and final edition of the Newspeak Dictionary (Orwell 66). Newspeak was a development from the English language, Oldspeak, into a concise and more controlled version of itself. Newspeak is to be so different from that of Oldspeak that people would have to relearn the language in order to understand it and communicate coherent thoughts (Orwell 66). This was to be a lengthy development, with its final implementation not completed until the year 2050.

Newspeak was not the expanding of an existing language or the natural development of a language. Rather, it dealt with the destruction of a language. The purpose was to assist and support the ideological bias of Ingsoc by forcing the use of Newspeak. When conversing with Winston in the canteen of the ministry, Syme explains the true purposes of Newspeak

> You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're
> destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. 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. (Orwell 66)

The natural development of a language generally follows the opposite direction of this, adding hundreds of new words and concepts to a language's lexicon and dictionary each year (Zazulak). Then, as opposed to evolving the range of concepts and ideas of a language, Newspeak aims to reduce its vocabulary dramatically, allowing for less variety and range in the language. This aligns with its purpose of using language as a medium to control thoughts and reduce the room for free thinking in the individual (Orwell 392). The Inner Party believes a smaller pool of words would result in reducing the ability to voice or think any concepts or thoughts not in line with the Ingsoc ideology; *Crimethink* in Newspeak (Orwell 392).

In the appendix on Newspeak, we follow the process of creating Newspeak outside of the story's narrative, which provides invaluable explanations of the technicalities of Newspeak and how the Ministry of Truth is operating in its treatment of language. The vocabulary was to develop into something that gave each word a constructed and exact meaning while excluding any other meanings or connotations related to the words (Orwell 392). What helped this restriction was the deletion of words that could be removed in the existence of a purely Ingsoc ideologized vocabulary.

In part, there were new additions to the vocabulary, but its primary goals lie in the elimination of words that are deemed unnecessary or could be used for *crimethink* or *thoughtcrime;* thinking, or voicing, non-conformist opinions. To a contemporary English speaker in the 21st century, it may be hard to visualize what such a change would entail, but a good example lies in the word *free:*

> The word *free* still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as 'This dog is free from lice' or 'This field is free from weeds.' It could not be used in its old sense of 'politically free' or 'intellectually free' since political and intellectual freedom no longer existed even as concepts, and were therefore of necessity nameless. (Orwell 392).

These limitations in the language ensured that any unorthodox or philosophical conversation would be near impossible. The words that remained expressed direct and simple thoughts, often actions or concrete objects (Orwell 394). Then, its purpose was to create orthodox one-to-one correspondences of the language, which in a sense disabled the citizens

of Oceania from thinking or formulating anything outside of what the Inner Party had determined to be the meaning of the word in the Newspeak dictionary.

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF *1984*

Saussure attributes a wide array of aspects to the sign that explains how they function, how their meaning is formed, and how each sign contributes to the overall system of language. These aspects will be explained, and the research will then be used to analyse and compare them with textual evidence from *1984* and its appendix to better our understanding of how Newspeak functions and whether Orwell's language aligns with Saussurean theory, and, in turn, whether its implementation is viable. The aspects that will be considered are arbitrariness, value, difference, the collective consciousness, and mutability. The following analysis will discuss specific textual examples that illustrate how these concepts can be related to *1984.* There are, however, some observations that need to be taken into consideration when analysing the narrative of *1984* from the perspective of Newspeak as an implemented language in Oceania.

Firstly, the narrative perspective of *1984* is third-person limited omniscient. This means that the narrator is outside of the book itself, and thus, any phrasing or words voiced by the narrator cannot be analyzed to decide whether Newspeak is being successfully implemented or not. Blakemore argues that the party's effort to control the individual's mind through language is subverted by the "Oldspeak narrator who asserts the linguistic "past" (349) and that the messages of the narrator function as a protest of the linguistically controlled society. There are, however, little to no indications that the narrator is at all part of the Oceanian society, or that the narrative language is used in order to subvert or comment on Newspeak, and for that reason, there will be no comments on the language of the narrator. We can, however, use the narrative voice to highlight the contrasts between what we as a reader can understand of Newspeak, and how the characters observe the language. Outside of this, the dialogue will be the only way in which we can interpret how Newspeak as an existing language functions within Oceania.

Secondly, it is important to consider that the novel plays out in 1984 and the Inner Party's goal is not to have the language fully implemented for another 66 years, in the year 2050. Thus, it is an impossibility to observe whether the citizens of Oceania will embrace the language as their own. Rather, the observations that we *are* able to make is whether there is

an awareness of what is happening to the language and whether the individuals, at least those of the Inner and Outer Party, have begun adopting the Newspeak terminology. As mentioned previously, the following aspects will also be used as a means to observe whether Orwell's fictional language of Newspeak is a plausible construction, and how such a language would function, and the results it would have on the citizens of Oceania should it be implemented.

ARBITRARINESS

The relationship between the signifier and signified of a linguistic sign is wholly arbitrary (Saussure 67) as there is no natural connection between the two. Similarly, the relationship between the sign and its referent is also arbitrary. The conventions of a community are ultimately what decide the denotations and potential secondary meanings of a sign (Tyson 218). Saussure further argues that while the linguistic sign is arbitrary, it cannot be changed by a single individual once it has been established in a "linguistic community" (Saussure 68). Because of the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs, their meaning must be learnt by the speakers of a language through the help of other linguistic signs, or with the help of instruction from those more knowledgeable (Sturrock 84).

Together with the Structuralist perspective that it is indeed language that determines how we see the world, and not the world itself determining how we use language, then this arbitrariness is equally important when looking at different language communities. Because languages differ in their vocabulary and signs, no two language communities will interpret the world in similar ways (Sturrock 37). Sturrock further argues that this arbitrariness may be a "more radical matter than it is sometimes realized, because it establishes the autonomy of language in respect of reality." (36). A structuralist stance on language would disagree with the conception that language is a system consisting of a "conventional item-by-item naming of the contents of the world around us." (36), which is, however, one of the purposes of Newspeak's development (Orwell 392). They go on to state that only in a limited sense could this theory of language as a nomenclature be plausible if one

> restricts the inventory of things waiting to be named to straightforward categories of physical objects or actions. If a language were all nouns and verbs, the argument might hold. But because languages contain other categories of sign, and because the signs enter into complex logical relations with one another when they are used, the nomenclature argument becomes wholly inadequate. (Sturrock 36)

While this may make the argument of nomenclature redundant when looking at most, if not all, non-fictional languages such as English, the argument may hold up more so when looking at the case of Newspeak. Looking at *1984*, we see that one of the goals of Newspeak is to essentially remove all parts of speech apart from nouns and verbs, only allowing for affixes to determine any other function: "adjectives were formed by adding the suffix -ful to the noun-verb, and adverbs by adding -wise" (Orwell 394). Few adverbs from Oldspeak remained, resulting in little to no distinction, interchangeability, between words and their parts of speech. The other half of the nomenclature argument; the complex logical relations between signs, is another aspect of the language that the Inner Party strives to demolish. With Newspeak, we see that what is happening to the language is that linguistic signs have their meaning "far more rigidly defined. All ambiguities and shades of meaning had been purged out of them" (Orwell 393), they express only "*one* clearly understood concept" (393), and the purpose of the signs became to express simple and direct thought. Then, Newspeak seems to resist the idea that there needs to be a complex yet arbitrary relationship between linguistic signifiers and signifieds. It does so by forcibly implementing changes to the language that Saussure and Sturrock argue are implausible.

This is in stark contrast to the functions and purposes of the English language, and the arguments that Saussure makes of the complexity of signs have all but been destroyed with Newspeak. Then, Newspeak would quite closely resemble the one-to-one correspondence between linguistic items and their respective concepts in the world that this theory proclaims. Saussure's theory indicates that should the Inner Party be successful in their implementation of the final form of Newspeak, this would result in a language without complexity or logical relations, where the individuals of Oceania have no competence to formulate any thought outside of those in ideological alignment with the Inner Party, because the individual knows of no such possibilities, no such linguistic signs, as to formulate anything else.

VALUE

Saussure suggests that the value of these signs are directly related to their place within the structure and the system of language, gaining further quality through the multiple relations that the sign has with other signs of the target language (Sturrock 38). Linguistic signs do not possess the sufficiency to have value in their independent form, as the sign is defined by everything that it is not (Sturrock 39). He takes care to draw attention to the

distinction between signs and signification, noting that the latter term is used when looking at the application of the sign into the world.

Further, Saussure exemplifies this value by using two examples that each shows us how the *value* of a sign can be distinguished, but also how it closely relates to the *identity* of a sign. First, he brings up a comparison of the English and French words for sheep (Saussure 115-116). He argues that while both share "signification" they do not have the same value. The English word for a piece of lamb served on a platter is titled *mutton* and not *sheep*. Modern French does not share this distinction between the sheep that is alive walking the pastures and the one that is being served as food, both using the signifier *mouton*. This means that the English language makes a distinction that the French does not, and there is a different relationship between the two signs that is not present in French. This results in languages assigning different values to words.

Another example that again shows us the value we assign words, but from a different perspective is Saussure's example of a chess-piece (Saussure 110). On its own, a chess-piece has no value; it is when it is employed in the game of chess where it becomes a "real concrete element" (Saussure 110) embedded with *value*. Should the chess-piece however be destroyed, it could be replaced by something that shares a resemblance to it, or even just of an appropriate size. This illustrates how the value is not in the object of the chess-piece itself but in the qualities and the identity that we attribute to it. As Saussure puts it, "We see then that in. . . systems like language. . . the notion of identity blends with that of value and vice versa." (Saussure 110).

Using Saussure's terminology of *values* in linguistic signs, we can analyse the values of Newspeak in *1984* and whether the two align. Syme argues that many of the words currently existing in Oldspeak will become obsolete (Orwell 66) and unusable. Further, the principles of Newspeak indicate that in the reduction of the vocabulary size, they will be successful in reducing the room for free thinking in the individual (Orwell 392). However, like the chess-piece in Saussure's example, destroying or removing the word will not remove its value or identity. This indicates that the effects that Newspeak strives for in abolishing what they call *crimethink* is not entirely feasible, or rather, that if the goal is to destroy the *value* and *identity* that we attribute to words, they need to do more than simply destroy the linguistic signs as the linguistic community may assign the value to a new signifier to suit their needs.

This then becomes the ultimate weakness in the feasibility of the development of Newspeak. Taking the example represented when arguing in abolishing the values that we, in English, assign to the word *free*, the appendix argues that its only use would be found in "such statements as 'this dog is free of lice'" (Orwell 392). The values of political freedom or intellectual freedom were supposedly abolished because of the removal of non-conformist words and concepts. However, it does not explain how it does this outside of the destruction of words; which, as indicated, may not be enough to remove the *value* and *identity* of the word.

This is not to say that all words would face such struggles, however. Simpler changes like removing the noun *thought* (Orwell 394), and having the verbal form replace its noun form using the word *think* would likely not face the same difficulties, because the *value* and *identity* we assign to these two words are to a larger extent one and the same; they are simply different parts of speech recognized by different signifiers. Similarly, new creations of words consisting of verbal shortcuts in the shape of compound words would find less difficulty in this respect as the value and identity of the words have their origin in the Newspeak dictionary – by being their own creations, the Inner Party can to a certain extent assign the values and identity of the concepts in accordance with their political agendas.

There may even be difficulties here, nonetheless, as many of the compound words found in *1984* consist of two words with already assigned identities, such as *goodthink* (Orwell 400). Both the words *good* and *think* are familiar linguistic signs that to English speakers, or Oldspeak speakers, already have assigned *value* and it is not certain that these values are destroyed in the transition from two individual concepts to one compound word. Overlooking this aspect of language and words may halt the implementation of Newspeak in that society will ultimately find a way to assign these values to other signifiers according to the needs of the linguistic community.

Furthermore, if we return to the scene at the canteen where Winston meets Syme, Winston overhears someone in the distance conversing in Newspeak, and this is the first time we can observe the language being used within conversation in *1984* and not through written means. On explaining what this sounded like to Winston, the narrator states that

> "from the stream of sound that poured out of his mouth it was almost impossible to distinguish a single word. . . it was just a noise, a quack-quack-quacking. And yet, though you could not actually hear what the man was saying, you could not be in any doubt about its general nature. .

. you could be certain that every word of it was pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc. . . It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx. The stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech in the true sense: it was a noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck." (Orwell 70-71)

While Winston is able to identify the noise as Newspeak, he cannot comprehend what the man is communicating, outside of knowing it is in line with Ingsoc ideology. This is in part due to his lack of understanding of the values and identities of the words, and not necessarily because the words themselves are foreign to him. With the political vocabulary largely consisting of newly coined compound phrases, euphonic in nature but which strived to provide monotonous and easy-to-produce speech (Orwell 397), it is likely that much of what Winston heard was unintelligible. Like mentioned, the compound words of the vocabulary such as *goodthink* (Orwell 400) already existed in the Oldspeak words of *good* and *think,* yet the values assigned to them are entirely different in Newspeak. Because of the drastic change in the values of the linguistic signs, Winston's observation of Newspeak seems entirely foreign and unintelligible.

On Winston's comments that it was not the man's brain, but his larynx, that was speaking, we can see that the Inner Party's agenda is beginning to work. The monotonous vocabulary allowed for speech that was "independent of consciousness" (Orwell 402). Thus, those working with Newspeak believed that by making speech simplified in both form, denotations, and tone, they could "diminish the range of thought" (Orwell 393) and make the language devoid of all meaning by the removal of the value and identity of words. The results would then be, as Winston puts it and the aspect of value suggests, a production of sound rather than of thought or meaning.

As a reader of *1984*, we can observe the ironies of words presented in the novel like the names of the Ministries: miniluv, minipax, minitrue, and miniplenty (Blakemore 352). We understand that these terms are contradictions of themselves in that the Ministry of Love deals with war, the Ministry of Truth deals with lies, etc (Orwell 283). The irony of these words, however, is something that Winston is entirely unaware of, proven by him simply treating them as abbreviations. Winston and other Oceanian citizens are "ignorant of the historical meaning of words, as the Party's assault on Oldspeak slowly removes the accumulated historical meanings" (Blakemore 352). Winston misses the significance of these phrases because the Oldspeak values and identities of those words no longer exist when the

book plays out in 1984 (Blakemore 352). While we can observe the word love existing in its Oldspeak form when Julia confesses her feelings on a note to Winston stating "I love you" (Orwell 140), and he shows an understanding of the old value and denotation of the word, the same word seems to be lost on Winston when used in the ironic manner of miniluv. This becomes an early indication that at the very least, parts of Newspeak can become accepted by the larger linguistic communities, despite changes to the linguistic signs' arbitrariness, values, and identities without the collective questioning the removal of previous denotations and meanings. It indicates that the citizens of Oceania are not cognizant of the changes that are beginning to be made to the language, and in turn, their conception of the world.

DIFFERENCE

In a language, the sign and the signifier work by interacting with one another in a relationship of differences. It is through the differences and contrasts with other words that we can understand linguistic signs, and these differences have negative relations (Fry 99). By being able to distinguish among the linguistic signs that are in our vocabulary, we choose what words to communicate, and this choice is made by "choosing signs that are not other signs" (Fry 102-103). By this, Fry means that we may often think we simply 'know' a word because we know what it is, but it is in fact due to the context that we put the word into, by what words it differs from, that we find our understandings.

Tyson presents a clear example of how we perceive things regarding their differences:

> Red is red only because we perceive it to be different from blue and green". If we did not differentiate between colour, we would not need the linguistic sign red… We understand up only in relation to down, and good in relation to evil. Without the opposites, the meaning would be lost." (Tyson 213).

This aspect of semiotics then suggests that users of Newspeak may find difficulties when trying to understand words if there are none with negative relations. At the same time, however, there are cases of Newspeak where differences will remain, but perhaps be more limited, which may suggest that finding the meaning of a word would be an easier process because there are fewer comparisons to be made. Analysing *1984,* we can observe that binary opposites like *bad* in contrast to *good* (Orwell 67) are removed and instead replaced by the prefix un-, because it deems the need for binary opposites to be unjustifiable (Orwell 67).

Ungood is then the opposition to good. Then, their goal was to destroy the antonyms existing in order to create an interchangeability among the parts of speech and instead utilize affixes to change meaning or indicate strength.

The question then becomes whether it is possible for a prefix that implies 'not' to cover enough difference from the word it attaches to that the aspect of *difference* still applies. The word ungood implies something less than good, but it does not necessarily imply what the word 'bad' does. Then, if the linguistic sign and binary opposite 'bad' is removed along with its concept, it would be near implausible to understand what 'ungood' actually implies or what its true meaning is. The outcome of this would only serve to hinder the successful communication of coherent thought and in the understanding of concepts when there are no separate linguistic signs that carry their opposite meanings.

With Orwell's Newspeak, to indicate strength, or the comparative and superlative, the prefixes of *plus-* and *doubleplus-* were used. This way, even more words could be destroyed (Orwell 67, 395). Words such as "excellent" and "splendid" are certainly inherent and considered indispensable to any fluent English speaker, and the two words carry different conceptual meanings to us than what the word "good" could cover. For speakers of Newspeak, however, these terms are deemed superfluous, insignificant and language should instead be reduced to some of its most basic vocabularies, with standardized inflections to indicate strength or opposites.

Then, the Inner Party believes that antonyms and other words that indicate strength served little to no purpose to the language (Orwell 67). This contrasts with the structuralist ideas presented above, which suggests that if they were to remove these words, those using Newspeak would struggle to find meaning or understanding in the language. If signs begin to lose their meaning, the language too may start losing its meaning.

The differences of words that we catalogue through when looking for understanding can be referred to as *clusters* of words (Fry 101), which contain the options we have when communicating, and contain synonyms, related words, and antonyms to a given word. These clusters exist to give us options to convey the intended meaning that we wish to communicate. With Newspeak, these clusters would become very small in that the categories of synonyms and antonyms will be shrunk to fewer and simplified forms. Related words may then be where users of Newspeak would find their clusters, or perhaps different clusters

would develop according to the needs of the linguistic community. One such cluster may be ideological, as Newspeak is in essence, a language of ideology. The issue then, however, is that there is only one ideology to communicate or to understand, meaning that such a cluster would not rely on differences and their negative relations, but more so their similarities. In short, the aspect of difference would become weakened with the development of Newspeak due to its reduction in clusters and linguistic signs that carry different meanings.

Revisiting the characters of *1984,* we see that Winston observes the speech in the canteen as being part of the unconscious, which is another aspect of Newspeak that Syme picks up on, stating that any orthodox thoughts and concepts do not require conscious thinking "Orthodoxy is unconsciousness" (Orwell 69). The goal was to enable its users to communicate orthodox thought without the need to actually think (Shadi 185), without the need to sort through language clusters by their difference, but simply to produce communication that carried little meaning other than its support of Ingsoc. The use of compound words and abbreviations helped separate the words from their "conscious and unconscious connotations" (Shadi 185), removing much of the differences in language by limiting their denotative meanings. A word such as *thoughtcrime* is both easier to produce phonetically and can be done without much consideration in comparison to saying 'a punishable thought or formulation that is considered unorthodox or against Ingsoc'. By simplifying and reducing the language to its core, Newspeak simplifies and strips down the human consciousness.

THE COLLECTIVE

Saussure posits that no single individual or group can change what we name linguistic signs or their signifiers (Saussure 71). The linguistic community is who determines the attributes of the signs of a language. Instead, things are what they are because they are, and if they were not that, they would be something different with a different name (Saussure 71). In a language, everyone is constantly contributing, and the language is influenced by everybody who uses it (Saussure 74) as a collective. This makes languages one of the hardest things to manipulate, due to it following a natural progression rather than a forced development. The only 'law' that a language follows, Saussure argues, is tradition. Thus, it develops with the needs of the linguistic community.

With Newspeak and *1984*, it is a small group of individuals at the Research Department who are developing the language (Orwell 66), and not that of a linguistic community. Then, the task of stripping the language down, which the Inner Party has assigned themselves, should be near impossible from Saussure's perspective of the collective. Under normal circumstances perhaps it would be. Should the Inner Party, however, exert their full totalitarian power through not just language, but manipulation, lies, and torture, they may succeed in implementing these changes to the language. On the law of tradition, we see that the Inner Party is aware that the acceptance of Newspeak is a lengthy process due to this lack of tradition, acknowledging its implementation is not to be completed for another 66 years. Nonetheless, whether by choice or by force, the Inner Party believes its citizens will begin to adhere to the rules of Newspeak and begin practicing the language until it once again could become tradition and considered a cultural construct.

Additional meanings for signifiers come in the shape of connotations. These connotations are the meanings of a linguistic sign as applied by the needs of the linguistic community who use them (Sturrock 42). Connotations arise whenever the linguistic community's needs are not covered by the denotation of a signifier. In essence, they are the secondary meanings of words, and are new usages of linguistic signs rather than new concepts. The development of new connotations must be considered both appropriate and functional by the linguistic community (Sturrock 90). If the collective's attitude towards a new connotation follows these criteria, it will be used and accepted into the language. If not, the connotation will soon fade.

The collective's effects on language and linguistic signs become particularly noteworthy when considering Newspeak's removal of denotations and words. One such example presented is of the word *free*, and how such a phrase like "The dog is free from lice" (Orwell 392) would be possible, but concepts of intellectual freedom would be forcibly removed. Intellectual freedom is then a secondary meaning of the word free. Like the aspect of value, the aspect of the collective consciousness argues that eliminating a word will not eliminate its concept or value, but instead temporarily remove our way to communicate it. Should the linguistic community, the citizens of Oceania, need a linguistic sign to formulate these ideas, this theory, too, argues they would find the means to do so using either existing words, or by coining new ones.

What may perhaps be more difficult is finding ways that fit the criteria of appropriateness in the language because of the removal of so many words. The resulting effect is impossible to predict, for it depends on how large a group adheres to Newspeak and its definitions, how successful the Inner Party is in their manipulation, and whether there is a large enough group of individuals within the linguistic community to develop the need for new linguistic items that go against any form of Ingsoc. Perhaps it would be that a smaller linguistic community still uses the word 'free' to imply political freedom, but when communicating to those who have embraced true Newspeak and Ingsoc ideology, such a concept would be foreign and unexplainable to them.

When analysing the dialogue in *1984* from the perspective of the collective, we can observe that very few individuals are practicing Newspeak as a natural occurrence. When Winston is talking to Syme about the development of the Newspeak dictionary, Syme comments on Winston's use of Newspeak when working at the Records Department with rewriting news articles.

> "'You haven't a real appreciation of Newspeak, Winston, he said almost sadly.' 'Even when you write it you're still thinking in Oldspeak. I've read some of those pieces that you write in the *Times* occasionally. They're good enough, but they're translations. In your heart you'd prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning." (Orwell 67-68)

This indicates that Winston is to some extent aware of how to use Newspeak, and knows there are differences between it and Oldspeak, yet his habits tell him to use Oldspeak, and thus the language comes off as a translation. As Saussure's theories suggest, language is shaped through the traditions (Saussure 74) of the linguistic community. For Winston, these traditions are those of Oldspeak, and as such, he treats Newspeak as a foreign language. Due to the limitations of Newspeak in its reduction of language clusters, his ability to communicate the range of meaning that he is able to as part of the Oldspeak linguistic community is not equally possible with Newspeak. Similarly, because Newspeak is largely an alien language to Winston, he is yet to fully embrace the new values and identity of the Newspeak vocabulary. The consequences of this are that his use of Newspeak reads not as a natural occurrence, but as a practiced convention. Another worthy notation on the above quote is that while berating Winston for his use of Oldspeak, Syme himself is guilty of using

Oldspeak, which shows that the implementation of Newspeak even with members of the Inner Party who praises its structure is fallible.

One of the book's main antagonists is O'Brien. As one of the leading figures of the Inner Party in the novel, it could be assumed that he too would be embracing Newspeak and, at the very least, beginning to use it in his speech even if it is not to be fully implemented for another 66 years. This, however, is not the case even in the later stages of the novel. When O'Brien is interrogating and torturing Winston at the Ministry of Love, we can observe him using purely Oldspeak, outside of a few abbreviations. He asks Winston what he remembers about previous thoughtcrime stating "Some years ago you had a very serious delusion indeed" (Orwell 322) and later on when questioning Winston's motives, O'Brien states "You have had thoughts of deceiving me" (Orwell 368).

In the appendix on Newspeak, we see that part of every-day speech went through drastic grammatical changes. Parts of speech became somewhat entwined with one another (Orwell 394), as words that were previously nouns or verbs would now function as both, and to use a word in either its adjectival or adverbial form one would simply introduce affixes to the word. Any words that previously had a different root in the distinction between its verb and noun forms, such as the noun *thought* and the verb *think* (Orwell 394) had one of its forms abolished in favour of a more rigid language. Instead, the verb form *think* would be used as both a verb and a noun. Here, then, O'Brien is using the Oldspeak noun form of the word that is abolished in Newspeak. Similarly, in the first example, O'Brien uses the phrase 'very serious', when the new grammar for emphasis was to use the prefixes plus- or doubleplus- (Orwell 395) and the term 'very' was to be removed. The correct term would then have been 'plusserious'.

For linguistic signs to be accepted by the linguistic community of Oceania, it would first need to be put into use by those in power as they are in favour of its implementation and then 'spread' to the rest of the communities through practice and, in the case of Oceania, through propaganda. Then, at the very least, it would be logical that those most supportive of Ingsoc and the Inner Party would be the first to adopt Newspeak. They would not only be the easiest to persuade of its appropriateness and correctness, but they also understand and agree with the values of the linguistic signs, and know why the removal of denotations and connotations are important to the Inner Party in the goals of controlling the thoughts of its

citizens. Yet, O'Brien, who is on top of the Ingsoc food-chain, is still resorting to using Oldspeak. This could be indicative that its implementation is unfeasible, however, it is important to again note that this conversation plays out in 1984, and there are decades to go before Newspeak is meant to be fully implemented in Oceania. Because the Inner Party already aligns with Ingsoc and are pure orthodox individuals, they may not see the need for them incorporating Newspeak into the language yet, when their focus needs to be on controlling any potential rebellion from the majority population, which consisted of the Outer Party and the Proles (Orwell 272).

MUTABILITY

The mutability of a language, its ability to change, Saussure claims is near impossible (Saussure 74-78). More specifically, he claims that the 'revolution' of a language would be impossible, but that certain aspects of the linguistic sign lend themselves to both immutability and mutability. Over time, the meanings that we attach to words change, both denotative and connotative. Whether this change is in the phonetic structure of the signifier, or in changing the concept of the signified, they always result in a shift in the relationship between signifier and signified (Saussure 75). What the Inner Party is doing to the language can only be described as a revolution of language, claiming the language to be so different it must be retaught to users of Oldspeak (Orwell 66). This is a feat that Saussure would claim impossible, then. The means by which they do so, however, aligns with Saussure's aspects of mutability.

By modifying the signifier or signified of a sign, the relationship is undoubtedly changed. Textual evidence suggests The Inner Party is aware of such a change when Syme comments that the language will not just be "changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be" (Orwell 69). This hints at an awareness that by removing any secondary meanings or denotations of a word may result in the new meaning being entirely different to what it used to mean, and its use would thereby change as well. By now, we also know that this is in fact the purpose of Newspeak – they hope to achieve change in the relationship within linguistic signs by either removing other linguistic signs that we relate them to, their *difference*, or by stripping down the meaning of a word.

The complexity of language development is that it lends itself both to immutability and mutability (Saussure 76). Saussure argues that because language is both a product of the social communities who use it, and of time, it is immutable. On the contrary, however, the arbitrariness of linguistic signs discussed earlier allows for freedom in the relationship between signifier and signified. Then, the result is that each element of the linguistic sign has its own mutability, and that language in some ways "changes, or evolves, under the influence of all the forces which can affect either sounds or meanings" (Saussure 76).

One such force would be the Inner Party, who are influencing, or rather, creating the language and the dictionary. While the feat of revolutionizing the language, on one hand, Saussure argues, is impossible, the truth for Newspeak is that it makes it possible through its ideology and ruling of Oceania. The room for change in language is far more plausible by those governing Oceania because they *force* their changes, their ideology, on its citizens through brutality, rather than allow for natural linguistic progression. While many ruling powers in the real world attempt to impose control on its citizens through the limitations of language and discourse, *1984* takes these lengths to extremes unlike any other (Shadi 183). Being a totalitarian regime with the technological means to tamper with both the language itself and historical records, and the determination to enforce one single ideology on its people means that the consequences become to a certain degree inevitable in having the language develop into Newspeak and the Oceanian citizens being oppressed through linguistic reductions (Shadi 183).

Another challenge for the Inner Party lies in keeping control of the language. Even if they are successful in drastically changing the language and having it accepted by the larger linguistic community, they would struggle to keep the language from changing further. Saussure states that "Whoever creates a language controls it only so long as it is not in circulation; from the moment when it fulfills its mission and becomes the property of everyone, control is lost" (76). This means that the rulers of Oceania would eventually lose control of their constructed language once it is fully accepted into the collective consciousness. Yet, the Inner Party would never settle for such a rebellion. Their hatred of language, as Blakemore (354) puts it, and their obsession with removing the linguistic past ensures that The Inner Party will never be satisfied with what the language has become and will thus never be willing to give up the control of the language. While they may not be

willing to let go of this control, Saussure's theories argue that it is inevitable for the linguistic community to gain control of the language.

Perhaps then, what The Inner Party will strive to do, is to consistently keep reducing the language to the point that it makes it unintelligible for even its speakers, and the consciousness of the individual is all but destroyed. Blakemore (354), too, argues this; he believes there will be no definitive version of a Newspeak dictionary, as the language will become more and more narrow, mutilated to the point that there is no linguistic past or future. This endless cycle is continued due to the ideology of the Inner Party's whose beliefs are that "whoever controls language controls our sense of what time and reality "is." (Blakemore 354).

While the citizens of Oceania may understand that the language is being, quite literally, forced down their throats, their eventual acceptance and progression into Newspeak users would lead them to regain control of the language. The result would be that when back in the hands of the linguistic community, the language would once again lend itself to the aspects of arbitrariness, value, difference, and the collective, which ensures the mutability of language. This, in turn, would inevitably lead to changes to the language that suit the needs of the linguistic community and no longer serve the ideological purposes of The Inner Party and Ingsoc. Perhaps then, the envisioned final version of Newspeak will, in fact, not be the final development of the language, but rather, as Saussure theories of semiotics and language states, it will continue to change in the hands of the linguistic community and thus follow a more traditional progression of language development.

CONCLUSION

This essay has investigated the functions of Newspeak from the perspective of Saussure's semiotics and his views on language. It has analysed what aspects of his theories align with those of Newspeak and which do not, whether an implementation of Newspeak is viable in the Oceanian society, and what the results of such a language would be for the citizens of Oceania. First, an overview of previous research on the language of *1984* was made, followed by a theoretical background into Saussure and his theory of semiotics, as well as an explanation of the technicalities of Newspeak. Then, using specific examples from *1984*, a semiotic analysis of the functions of language in *1984* was done using the aspects of

arbitrariness, value, difference, the collective, and mutability in order to establish to what extent Orwell's Newspeak can be applied using Saussurean theory.

Structuralist theories suggest that the forcible implementation of a language would, under normal circumstances, be near impossible. The Inner Party is, however, able to combat some of these theories through their psychological tactics. There remain aspects of language that the development of Newspeak seems ignorant of that would hinder its progress, such as that of difference, which argues that if linguistic signs lose their meaning, the language, in turn, will lose its purpose. Furthermore, the aspect of value also throws a wrench into the works of Newspeak, stating that removing a word's denotations will not remove the value or identity assigned to it, and thus, the essay deduced that once the control of the language inevitably returns to the collective, The Inner Party's ability to control Newspeak's development and destroying the individual's consciousness is impossible.

Another research question was investigating how we can observe Newspeak being used by the characters of the novel, and how the language would function in the minds of Oceanian citizens. The results suggest that Newspeak is only in a very limited sense used by few members of the Inner Party, mostly in the use of terminology, but that the use of such terminology does indicate that its implementation has begun. Yet, because the novel plays out in 1984 and we are not privy to its development through time, we are unable to follow its traditions, and so it is impossible to truly know whether the implementation of Newspeak was successful in Oceania. However, with the limited textual evidence that has been presented, the evidence suggests that Newspeak can enter the conscious and unconscious minds of its citizens without them entirely being aware that their perceptions of the world are being altered. If it were to be fully implemented, however, it would result in a language lacking complexity and reasoning, where the individual citizens lack the abilities or linguistic methods to form any unorthodox thought and thus poses less threat to the totalitarian government. It would result in the citizens of Oceania seeing the world as pure Ingsoc.

The limitations of this essay are in the lack of comments or considerations of Orwell's perspective on languages or Newspeak, and whether he is critical of the language and ideas that he presented, or whether he meant for the Appendix on Newspeak to read as satire as certain researchers have previously argued. These aspects were ignored as the purpose of this essay was to approach the language systems of *1984* as the development from one language,

Oldspeak, into a new language, Newspeak, which maintained much of the structure and grammar from its predecessor, but which turned the language into an ideological agenda.

When looking at future research, it would be interesting to see investigations into what a completed Newspeak dictionary would look like as a constructed language. This essay has pointed to certain flaws that the acceptance of Newspeak would face in the aspects of the value and differences of a linguistic sign. It would be of interest to research whether a non-constructed language has bypassed these aspects, or proven Saussure's theories wrong in what constitutes the development of language. Conclusively, if the opportunity presents itself, it would be interesting to further research the implications of authoritarian languages' effects on the individual consciousness from the perspective of Saussurean linguistics.

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