

The Dynamics of Manipulation in George Orwell's *1984* (1949)

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ABSTRACT

George Orwell's novel *1984* is one of his best known fiction. It has thus been abundantly studied and analyzed. Numerous issues in the novel ranging from totalitarianism and politics to psychology, language and history have critically been appreciated and addressed. Yet, there seems to be no research study that has independently but collectively addressed the dynamics and strategies of manipulation in the novel. Therefore, the current research paper aims to investigate such tactics and dynamics of manipulation in Orwell's novel *1984*. It aims to address and examine those devices and dynamics as variant and different but in a methodical and orderly manner. As such, the present study assumes that most manipulation undercurrents in the novel fall within four key categories; linguistic, historical, political and psychological. It thus proposes to study and analyze such dynamics of manipulation in accordance with the categorization within which they fall.

Keywords: George Orwell, *1984*, Dynamics of Manipulation, Linguistic, Political, Historic, Psychological

ديناميكيات التلاعب في رواية "١٩٨٤" لجورج اورويل

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المخلص

تعتبر رواية جورج أورويل "١٩٨٤" واحدة من أشهر رواياته. ولهذا فقد تمت دراستها وتحليلها بكثرة. حيث تم التناول النقدي للرواية ودراسة وتحليل العديد من القضايا فيها بدءاً من الشمولية والسياسة إلى علم النفس واللغة والتاريخ. ومع ذلك، يبدو أنه لا توجد دراسة بحثية تناولت بشكل

مستقل ولكن جماعي لديناميكيات واستراتيجيات التلاعب في الرواية. لذلك، تهدف الورقة البحثية الحالية إلى دراسة وتحليل تكتيكات وديناميكيات التلاعب في رواية أورويل "١٩٨٤". حيث تهدف إلى تناول ودراسة تلك الوسائل والديناميكيات باعتبارها متباينة ومختلفة ولكن بطريقة منهجية ومنظمة. وبناء على ذلك، تقترض الدراسة الحالية أن معظم أدوات وديناميكيات التلاعب في الرواية تقع ضمن أربع فئات رئيسية وهي؛ اللغوية والتاريخية والسياسية والنفسية. ولذا يقترح البحث الحالي دراسة وتحليل ديناميكيات التلاعب هذه وفقاً للتصنيف الذي تقع ضمنه. الكلمات المفتاحية: جورج أورويل، "١٩٨٤"، ديناميكيات التلاعب، اللغوية، السياسية، التاريخية، النفسية

Introduction

Language possesses a unique human capability to significantly shape thoughts and actions. Unrestricted growth of language facilitates broadening individuals' perspectives on various subjects and matters in their surroundings. Conversely, when constrained and controlled, it inhibits the expression of ideas and dissemination of information. George Orwell vividly illustrates the dual nature of language in his dystopian novel, *1984*. He demonstrates how linguistic elements hold the power to both influence and restrict human cognition profoundly. Orwell depicts language's ability to manipulate psychological functions effectively, steering popular thought towards specific objectives through engineered linguistic mechanisms.

In Orwell's *1984*, it could be observed how a particular kind of language prevails throughout the novel. That particular language seems so influential that it defines what characters might think of reality, direct their actions, inform their history and shape their identities. It even seems that language in the novel is constructed and programed in such a way as to intimidate people, shape their thoughts and deeds and not to communicate and express oneself as its original purpose. Such a coercion of this particular form of language seems to imbed into the minds of characters a sort of false or in the least unconscious understanding and knowledge of things.

Hence, whatever a character might do or wherever s/he might go, there always is the “enormous face gazing from the wall,” (Orwell, 1984: 7). Moreover, there are the ubiquitous and ever-present “telescreen [that] receives and transmits simultaneously”, and “Thought Police” that bugs everybody and through which each and every one is thus “overheard and scrutinized,” (8). Such tactics keep characters persistently alarmed and worried for they are fully aware of being under constant check and surveillance. Through the telescreen and thought police bugs, almost any sound even the murmuring type is recorded and then communicated to the concerned people.

Besides, such a state of being would then entrench these ways of living into routines and eventually into intrinsic instincts that would ultimately transform and adjust the internal as well as external thoughts and deeds of characters to comply with the desired agenda of the individuals or bodies in control. Language thus acts as a medium of constructing and shaping realities; be them linguistic, historical, political, psychological, and the like.

Control and absolute domination apparently require the manipulation of these and other domains of life. Additionally, such manipulation would in time impoverish the people mentally so that they would not be able to observe faults of or produce criticism against the dominating system. Accordingly, the linguistic discourse in the novel is apparently closely connected to and associated with historic, political and psychological discourses as well. In view of that, the people experiencing such diverse manipulation of language, history, politics and psychology would seemingly be deficient in mental capacities qualifying them to possess true knowledge of life, reality and the world.

The ensuing analysis delves into the examination and analysis of how language as employed in the novel would influence and possibly direct human linguistic, historic, political and even psychological processes and

awareness. It would explore and examine the different and various aspects of manipulation in the novel through the dominance of language and linguistic constructs over mental faculties.

Dynamics of Manipulation in George Orwell's Novel *1984*

Orwell was trying to convey the atmosphere of a society in which mass psychology, the systematic study and manipulation of crowd response, had become a major force in public life. (Bloom, *George Orwell's 1984*: 70)

Overview

Indulging into an investigation of the dynamics of manipulation in Orwell's novel *1984*, would seemingly entail—in addition to some introduction of the concept of manipulation—a certain elucidation of the association of manipulation with language. Assumably, manipulation seems to be mostly related to language and linguistic activities, to begin with. Language, it is widely assumed, encompasses all aspects of social life for it is essentially the medium of communicating and disseminating knowledge of all sorts; be that social, cultural, political or historic.

Language is also perceived as the principle tool through which people's minds can be accessed and life contexts can be explicated. As such, language seems to be involved with almost all social phenomena. It is "implicated in most of the phenomena that lie at the core of social psychology: attitude change, social perception, personal identity, social interaction, intergroup bias and stereotyping, attribution and so on," (Chiu 53). Thus, to get a clear idea of what manipulation is and how it operates, one has to look at what language is used and how it is treated.

Linguistic Dynamics of Manipulation

The association of manipulation to language is so significant because it is through language that manipulation of any sort works best. Besides, language is the "basic social institution, in the sense that all others

presuppose language, but language does not presuppose others,” (Searle 60). Accordingly, linguistic manipulation not only modifies and alters perceptions of language and awareness of it, but also extends in influence and effect to almost all other domains of human life. Such manipulation “of public language, ... , is an attack on thought,” (Quinn 251). Eventually, manipulating language would apparently outline the confines and frontiers of reasoning, of making sense and of ruling out any other possibilities.

In other words, though manipulation—as the current research paper is set to argue—would be diverse and could be fulfilled by various means and dynamics, linguistic manipulation or linking manipulation to language remains the key strategy of the whole spectrum. It is through language that people’s minds could be deprived and ruined, that total stability could be assured and that any possibilities of defiance or rebellion could be excluded. That is to say, it is through language that people could be manipulated not only linguistically, but also politically, historically and psychologically as well.

In view of that, the linguistic dynamics of manipulation in the novel occurs through the introduction of a new language called ‘Newspeak’, as a substitution for the normal and ordinary language. This new language ‘Newspeak’ assumes that each two opposing words entail two contrasting meanings in themselves.

The vocabulary of this language is mostly composed of conflicting pairs such as ‘blackwhite’ as one word. Within such conflicting pairs, the new language expects people to know things as they are told without engaging in any mental activities of any sort; be that reflecting, enquiring or questioning:

Like so many Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when party discipline demands this. But it

means also the ability to believe that black is white, and more to know that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary. (Orwell, 1984: 221)

The 'Newspeak' as the official and only language is thus supposed to establish this linguistic incongruity as the norm and makes such contradiction the standard way of thinking. As a result, the new language would apparently "make all other modes of thought impossible," (Orwell, 1984: 312). Within such a state of being, mere thinking becomes a major sin and a heinous felony as to be committed by an individual:

Even now, of course, there's no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It's merely a question of self-discipline, reality-control. But in the end there won't be any need for that. The revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. (Orwell, 1984: 55)

In view of that, there seems to be a common supposition in the novel that language creates thoughts and as such it has to be manipulated so much so that any possibility of thinking out of the box is ruled out entirely. Hence, manipulation of language involves all aspects of 'Newspeak' in order to confine the scope of thinking, or rather exclude it altogether.

Historic Dynamics of Manipulation

Just as language has closely been associated with manipulation, domination and control of all sorts, history and language are closely related here in terms of historic manipulation as well. Language continues to be a central force of influence in almost all contexts, history included. Assumingly for the sake of domination and control, language has to be employed to manipulate history.

Once the leader or system resorts to and uses language for the purpose of manipulating the people, language creates a state or a process called conditioning:

Wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behavior. For that there must be words, but words without reason. Till at last the child's mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child's mind. The adult's mind too—all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides—made up of these suggestions. (Ersoy 18)

Through such state called conditioning via the use of language, history is manipulated and people are constructed as subjects of a particular mentality. Through the help of language in manipulating the people historically and otherwise, even the introduction of words that might indicate strong emotions or could probably project subversive thoughts would not be possible. In addition, through utilizing language for manipulation, language itself turns into “a tool for conditioning happiness, which in turn prevents unhappiness from expressing itself in dissenting language,” (Sisk 32). Hence, through the use of language, not only could history be manipulated, but even the affective states of the people could be manipulated as well.

In the novel, the time is supposedly 1984 and Winston Smith, a lower-ranking Party member in Oceania, constantly faces surveillance from the Party through telescreens. The Party, led by the elusive Big Brother, controls all aspects of life, including history and language. Therefore, manipulation of history in the novel is conducted on what is yet to come, on what is not made known for the public. However, there remain people in this state who still remember the times before the foundation of the Ingsoc in 1984, their history is thus manipulated by rewriting memories and activities that are already known to everybody, too.

Therefore, fabricating events, memories and activities that everybody already knows and the people's apparent complicity in believing or pretending to believe them is an obvious illustration of manipulating

history in Orwell's *1984*. Such manipulation of history entails as necessary strategies—in addition to language as mentioned earlier—an absolute control over the people's memories and records of their history as well. In that respect, the novel shows that the controlling Party has changed the historical records of the people of Oceania, and has as a result controlled their human memory as a people.

Working in the Ministry of Truth, Winston alters historical records to align with the Party's narrative. Such alteration of the people's historical records is conducted in a way that the newly produced records would not in any case include anything that might motivate the people to defy the system or hope for changing it. After all documents are changed, modified or adjusted; the original copies are demolished so that the people have no documentary reference except those introduced by the party:

As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of the Times had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. (Orwell *1984*: 42)

Hence, the historical manipulation of the people in Oceania occurs through adjusting events and activities to history and not adapting history to events and facts: "rather than adapting to historical trends and events, trends and events are invented to suit the goals of the party," (Connelly 50). It thus seems that history is not just manipulated, historical facts and events are also amended and rewritten as well to suit the Party's desires and agenda.

In addition, it seems like modifying documents and historical records has not served the Party's fully. The Party and its members intend to organize and establish the entire past in a way that would make it comply with all emerging needs of the current times. In a conversation between the Inner Party member O'Brien and Winston over the issue of

the past events and memories and history, readers get to see a clearer picture of the historical manipulation of the people of Ocenia:

‘Where does the past exist, if at all?’

‘In records. It is written down.’

‘In records. And——?’

‘In the mind. In human memories.’

‘In memory. Very well, then. We, the Party, control all records, and we control all memories. Then we control the past, do we not?’ (Orwell 1984: 201)

In that order, Winston seems to be the only Party member and possibly the only citizen of Ocenia who, despite all the Party’s efforts of historical manipulation, succeeds in preserving his memory. The novel reveals that the Party’s manipulation of history troubles him, and he recalls conflicting information about alliances and enemies. After all, the novel reveals that “manipulation of memory and history, when taken too far, can incite rebellion,” (Becnel 14). Receiving a note from Julia expressing love, Winston’s affair with her intensifies. Eventually, they are caught when O’Brien, whom they believed to be an ally, betrays them. Taken to the Ministry of Love, Winston discovers O’Brien’s deception as a Party spy. O’Brien subjects Winston to months of torture and brainwashing.

In the culmination of his ordeal, Winston faces Room 101, where O’Brien exploits his fear of rats. Winston, broken and desperate, betrays Julia by pleading for the torment to be inflicted on her instead. This submission is what O’Brien sought all along. Winston, released back into society, has fully embraced the Party, devoid of any emotions for Julia, and has learned to love Big Brother. As a result, Winston stands as a living proof to the difficulty and dire consequences of objecting to, questioning or challenging the Party’s policy of manipulating history and altering the people’s records and memories.

Political Dynamics of Manipulation

Politically speaking, the world in Orwell's *1984* is divided into three regional categories called states; Oceania, Euroasia and Eastasia. These three states are comparable in all respects; they are equal regarding authority and power and have one leader named Goldstein. Even if these three states become in a state of war, the outcome of such fight will have neither a defeated state nor a victorious one. Nonetheless, though such a war seems to have no purpose and carries no meaning, it has—within the context of such community—a particular meaning dedicated to it:

It eats up the surplus of consumable goods, and it helps to preserve the special mental atmosphere that a hierarchical society needs.....the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact. (Orwell, *1984*: 207)

Besides, there exists a unique characterizing quality of these states in the form of a triangle of reference; 'the Book', 'Doublethink', and 'Newspeak'. The Book is something like the overall constitution of the three states. It provides the rules and laws according to which the three states and their people are run and managed during the times of peace as during the times of war as well. In deeper understanding, however, 'the Book' provides the leaders with the means necessary to have power and control over the three states and their people.

'Doublethink' represents the second pillar of ruling, control, preserving and consolidating power in these three states. While 'the Book' helps the leaders reach power and achieve absolute control, 'doublethink' assists them in preserving and holding to that power and control. It brings contradictory terms together, instructs the people through them and therefore causes the people to live in a state of complete estrangement and disaffection. Celebrating opposing terms such as 'war is peace', 'freedom is slavery', and 'ignorance is strength' conventional

values of such terms are alienated and people are easily manipulated and controlled:

Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. Doublethink lies at the very heart of Ingsoc, since the essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty..... Even in using the word doublethink it is necessary to exercise doublethink. For by using the word one admits that one is tampering with reality; by a fresh act of doublethink one erases this knowledge. (Orwell, *1984*: 223)

Hence, 'doublethink' seems to pave the way for a lack of understanding and rational reasoning on the part of the people. To further obscure the paradox of such terms, a new language complying with such logic is suggested. It replaces the "Oldspeak"—which is obviously the normal language—and is called 'Newspeak', and here comes the last part of the triangle.

In that order, the regional division of the three states and their political orientation, 'The Book', 'Doublethink' and 'Newspeak' seem to play a serious role in helping leaders manipulate their subjects politically and otherwise. However, the most effective political manipulation in Orwell's *1984* seems to be extensively performed through propaganda. In the novel, propaganda is apparently the vehicle of political manipulation. Although the novel appears to revolve mostly around totalitarianism and warn against it, it "provides a structure for examining other issues related to personal freedom and political manipulation, particularly propaganda," (Axelsson 8). Propaganda is thus a manipulative dynamic

that is remarkably employed to hold the people in check, to control them; that is, to manipulate them politically.

Hence, propaganda serves as a powerful political tool of manipulation in Orwell's *1984*, acting as a means to control people's thoughts through pervasive communication. The term propaganda seemingly "encompasses the manipulation of opinions through various forms of communal linguistic interactions, including stories, rumors, gossip, data, and drawings," (Hossain 29). It is further assumed that propaganda also implicates the circulation of "logically flawed information to manipulate a large segment of society for political, institutional, or individual interests," (*ibid*).

In *1984*, propaganda is the most vibrant dynamic of political manipulation; it is omnipresent, and is utilized by the ruling party to monitor and control every aspect of the people's actions, expressions, thoughts, and beliefs. The government exploits all media and communication channels to their fullest extent, measuring each form of communication to relentlessly and manipulatively spread politically intended ideas.

Psychological Dynamics of Manipulation

Psychological dynamics of manipulation in Orwell's *1984* could be assumed to occur through the cognitive manipulation of language. Some writers argues that the cognitive manipulation of language "occurs through intentional targeting in both text and speech," (Dijk 53). Hence, cognitive manipulation of language would assumingly entail a particular impact over external contextual factors, such as roles and relations, and even knowledge and purpose in a human community. Language is thus the fundamental means through which social life can be affected, cultural knowledge can be transmitted and consequently "various social psychology phenomena" (Chiu 37), can be influenced.

Readers would begin to have a clue of psychological manipulation in Orwell's *1984*, once they are introduced to Goldstein as the leader of 'brotherhood', which is an oppositional organization. Goldstein rules a place called 'Ocenia' and has a text called 'the Book'. In this book, Goldstein explains the fundamental principles upon which his state is founded:

The masses never revolt of their own accord, and they never revolt merely because they are oppressed. Indeed, so long as they are not permitted to have standards of comparison, they never even become aware that they are oppressed. (Orwell, *1984*: 169)

A close reading of the quote above would communicate a clear idea into the kind of society there is in Ocenia and the particular mentality as well as psychology of its people. In other words, it seems that the core principles of establishing Ocenia and governing its community originate in and depend upon the concept of manipulation of mind and psyche.

In such a community, people have no standards to compare; it is as if what they have and how they live is that all there is. The novel's narrative consolidates such comprehension in assuming 'Ocenia' as 'One State', and even 'the World State'. Hence, assuming that Ocenia is the world—the only world—that exists, the people are denied any chance of true knowledge and any right of comparison. As such, they are stripped off of any means and ways of defying the system, rebelling against it or even imaginatively brooding such luxurious possibilities.

In the fictional state of Oceania, as portrayed in the novel, a language called Newspeak is enforced to control and manipulate the thoughts and expressions of the people. This government-crafted language is tailored to suit the ruling party's preferences; it restricts popular thought by imposing a specific vocabulary. In Orwell's *1984*, language serves more as a tool for manipulation and intimidation than for regular communication. The omnipresent 'Big Brother' oversees every aspect of

life, and with slogans like ‘Big Brother is Watching You’, the so-called ‘Big Brother’ seems to be creating a constant atmosphere of psychological fear.

Mechanized language through spoken, written, and listened forms aims to keep individuals in a state of unconscious apprehension. Surveillance tools like the telescreen and the Thought Police contribute to the pervasive sense of scrutiny, eventually turning habits into instincts that are aligned with the state’s ideology. The physical infrastructure, exemplified by the Ministry of Love, further reinforces the oppressive environment with its lack of windows and imposing security measures. Even everyday items are named to emphasize the state’s superiority and seriousness.

Further manipulating the people’s cognitive and thus psychological perceptions of politics and the world, the world in Orwell’s *1984* is divided into three regional but politically equal states; Oceania, Euroasia and Eastasia. The assumption of political equality requires that these three states have one leader and equal authority. Besides, even if two states get into a state of war, such political and psychological manipulation of the people inculcates into their minds there is neither a victor nor a defeated one. After all, the people are told that the war “is unreal”, and that its ultimate object is “to keep the structure of society intact,” (Orwell, *1984*: 207).

Besides, to further conduct psychological and cognitive manipulation over the subjects, other referential principles are added to the political rules and laws: ‘Doublethink’, and ‘Newspeak’. ‘Doublethink’, for example, assists leaders in preserving and holding to power and control as it confuses the people’s mental, cognitive and psychological capacities. It combines contradictory terms, educates the people through them and then drive the people into living a life of thorough disillusionment and complete alienation.

Doublethink celebrates contrasting terms such as ‘war is peace’, ‘freedom is slavery’, and ‘ignorance is strength’. Hence, it alienates the traditional meanings of such terms and as a result helps to cognitively manipulate the people and psychologically control them:

Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. (Orwell, 1984: 223)

‘Newspeak’ as the new language operates in a similar manner to ‘Doublethink’. It further consolidates linguistic contradiction as a key principle, and thus further reinforce cognitive and psychological manipulation of the people. Hence, ‘doublethink’ and ‘Newspeak’ establish a lack of understanding and a deficiency of rational reasoning on the part of the people. Yet, it could also be concluded that it is this psychological manipulation that has eventually “spark[ed] Winston’s rebellion. Winston’s tendency to trust his own observations and memories,” (Becnel 14). Only when beginning to listen to his own psychology has Winston revolted against the Party and its manipulation of almost everything.

Concluding Remarks

The conclusion highlights the manipulation of language in Orwell’s 1984 where the Ingsoc government uses language to shape a distorted reality. Orwell emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between language and the mind, illustrating how the government’s Machiavellian tactics control people’s thoughts by manipulating their linguistic understanding, and therefore their political, historic and even psychological perceptions. The implementation of Newspeak—a language designed by the so called ‘Big Brother’, or the regulated administration—successfully

restricts citizens from expressing dissenting thoughts. The psychological and linguistic engineering in Ingsoc leaves citizens incapable of thinking beyond what they are conditioned to believe.

In view of that, language seems a central force of influence in both ends; it is through language that people might figure out their state of subjugation, and it is also through language that their leaders could manipulate them. And so, the people are manipulated historically, politically as well as psychologically through a peculiar application of language. Accordingly, dedicating much greater attention to language would provide valuable insights into comprehending all forms of manipulation in the novel, and not just the linguistic one. This is so because through manipulating language there will result historic, political and psychological manipulations in addition to a distorted construction of reality and a directed shaping of identity as consequences of that linguistic handling.

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