

Language as Political Control:
Newspeak Revisited

Jonathan Pool
Department of Political Science
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195

Bernard Grofman
School of Social Sciences
University of California, Irvine
Irvine, California 92717

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ABSTRACT

Could a state make its citizens speak and write a language like Newspeak, described by Orwell in 1984? Would the use of such a language suppress the population's ability to reason about politics?

Newspeak is a language created by grafting the morphology of Esperanto onto the syntax, semantics, and style of bureaucratic English. The derivation and inflection of words are very regular, simple, and productive; words are etymologically disassociated and easy to pronounce; meanings are controlled; synonyms are eliminated; and cliches and monotonous speech are legitimized.

The evidence largely supports the belief that a language like Newspeak could be successfully adopted for or by a speech community. Communities have accepted such language reforms with little coercion when proposed by states, voluntary associations, and individuals.

Preliminary evidence does not, however, support the belief that a language like Newspeak would impair the capacity for political reasoning. Persons using a language with features of Newspeak maintain their ability to resist verbal manipulation. When such a language is officialized, it also reduces ethnic and elite-mass linguistic gaps. In important ways, Newspeak represents a new linguistic technology of political equality and liberation.

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Jonathan Pool and Bernard Grofman

1. Introduction

Over the objections of the Book-of-the-Month Club, George Orwell insisted (Crick, 1980, p. 554) on ending his novel 1984 with an appendix on a language called "Newspeak". To judge from the enthusiastic popular reaction to it, Newspeak evokes strong beliefs about the relationship between language and political control. But are those beliefs true?

The general issue raised by Newspeak is whether the political leadership of a state can alter a language used within the territory under its rule and, if so, whether it can do so in such a way as to restrict its constituents' or subjects' ability to reason about politics. Newspeak also raises a specific issue: whether a political leadership could introduce the particular kinds of changes described in 1984 into the dominant standard language of a polity and, if so, whether this would help make its speakers subservient to, and uncritical of, the political authorities.

2. Language and political control

2.1. Competing assumptions

The general issue formulated above can be approached by separating the political manipulability of language and the linguistic manipulability of political thought. Assumptions regarding these two sub-issues are often stated in categorical and global terms. Many ideas about the general issue that Newspeak raises can thus be summarized by yes-no answers to a pair of questions:

Can rulers alter a language?

		No	Yes
Can alterations in a language restrict the ability to reason about politics?	No	Language as a political channel	Language as a political product
	Yes	Language as a political force	Language as a political tool

These assumptions combine to yield four types of models of language and the control of political thought.

2.2. Language as a political channel

Models of language as a political channel deny both the political manipulability of languages and the possibility that linguistic change could restrict political reasoning ability. "Structuralist" and "rationalist" models (Chomsky, 1975, ch. 4; Crystal, 1971; De George and De George, 1972, pp. xi-xxix) are mostly of this type. If, as rationalist models assume, the "biological properties of the organism" make all languages fundamentally similar (Chomsky, 1975, pp. 153-155), these properties also constrain the ability of human beings to alter languages. This ability is further limited by the tendency of mass publics (and especially their adult members) to conform only partly and slowly to linguistic reforms prescribed by political authorities. Changes do, of course, take place in all languages, but there is little good evidence that such changes have major impacts on cognitive abilities (Langacker, 1973, pp. 39, 57-58; Akmajian, Demers, and Harnish, 1979, pp. 220-221).

2.3. Language as a political product

Models of language as a political product deny that alterations in a language can restrict the capacity for political reasoning, but accept the assumption that political rulers can alter a language. One such model (Drezen, 1931, pp. 7-25; Girke and Jachnow, 1974, pp. 50-60; Springer, 1956, pp. 16-19, 28) assumes that languages are inventions that are created, split, joined, and reformed in response to, or even to some extent in anticipation or furtherance of, new economic and political conditions, such as divisions of labor, socialist revolutions, and amalgamations of formerly independent states. This model does not, however, assume that by changing the attributes of a language one can restrict its speakers' abilities to analyze their situation or to imagine alternative situations.

Models of language as a political product are common in the analysis of language policy. Studies by O'Barr and O'Barr (1976) and by Weinstein (1983), for example, argue for the assumption that states (as well as individuals and organized groups) deliberately and (at least some of the time) substantially influence the grammars, lexicons, and writing systems of languages. But, although these influences have political effects, including effects on opinions and sentiments, it is not assumed that the ability to think about politics is substantially affected. Only small cognitive differences have been found, for example, between literates and illiterates (Scribner and Cole, 1981), implying that the creation of a writing system for an unwritten language has small cognitive effects. Weinstein (1983, p. 23) summarizes this assumption about the relationship between language and thought by claiming that "we have more power over our language than it has over us."

2.4. Language as a political force

Models of language as a political force accept the assumption that variations in a language can seriously affect the ability to think (about politics or other things), but reject the assumption that the state (or other agents) can cause the kinds of linguistic change that would have such effects. One model based on such assumptions is "linguistic relativity" (Whorf 1956), which

claims that grammatical differences between language families can be responsible for important differences in the ability to perceive facts and form explanations. Concepts such as time, space, causality, and opposition, which are clearly relevant to political thinking, are linguistically dependent, according to such models (e.g., Judge, 1974). Some models of social power (e.g., Bernstein, 1971; Edelman, 1964, 1971, 1977; Lakoff, 1975) similarly assume that there are subtle biases in linguistic rules that inhibit critical thinking about politics by members of subordinate groups. But the linguistic features that constrain human thought are assumed systematic, invisible, and therefore not manipulable.

Studies and criticisms of linguistic change often assert that a language has become "corrupt" because of a growth or decline in its complexity, regularity, purity, ambiguity, or continuity (see, e.g., Cavett *et al.*, 1978; Lipatov, 1971; Newman, 1974; Orwell, 1945; Pei, 1973; Rank, 1974; Schlesinger, 1974; Shiraliiev, 1969; Tocqueville, 1848, pp. 477-482). They typically assume that a corrupt language corrupts the capacity for political thought. Regarding their language as out of control, however, they do not assume that state action can restore the desired linguistic features. They, too, then, tend to model language as a political force.

2.5. Language as a political tool

Models of language as a political tool make the assumption that a state can alter a language, and also make the assumption that the alteration of a language can affect the ability of its users to think about politics. Putting the two assumptions together, these models assume that a state can use linguistic manipulation to control the capacity of its population for political thought. Such control may, of course, take the form of stimulation. Laitin (1977), for example, has argued that in one country state manipulation of the writing system of a language caused the population to substitute one language for another as the medium of political discourse, and that this substitution made citizens more willing or able to use their own judgment rather than relying indiscriminately on authority when reasoning about problems of public policy.

Other models of language as a political tool assume that the purpose of using political power to manipulate languages is to suppress rather than to develop the capacity for political reasoning. Typically, such models are restricted to the manipulation of words, such as the substitution of invented words for traditional ones (Timurtaş, 1969), the creation of new words, or the use of old words with new meanings (Danet, 1976; Skidmore, 1972, pp. 177-192). As we shall see, however, Orwell (1949) extends this kind of model to include the reform of the grammar of a language as well as its lexicon.

2.6. Implications

The four types of models discussed above differ in their assumptions about whether linguistic features:

- (a) can be politically manipulated;
- (b) can affect the ability to think about politics.

In their implications for political behavior, models of language as a political

tool differ fundamentally from the other three. If language is a political tool, then at least those rulers who understand the nature of language and who want to control their populations' capacity for political reasoning should be expected to try to manipulate languages. Those rulers who do manipulate languages should be expected to succeed at least part of the time. And rulers who manipulate languages should be more successful at controlling their subjects' political thinking than rulers who do not, all else being equal.

If we assume that the ability to reason well about politics is a prerequisite for effective political opposition to a regime (this is not an obvious assumption), then models of language as a political tool specify a linguistic mechanism for the perpetuation of political power. They resemble models in which rulers have a special ability to accumulate money or knowledge, which in turn helps rulers maintain their rule (e.g., Michels, 1915). But studies of absolutist power systems (e.g., Elkins, 1959; Kogon, 1946) often find them unstable, in part because the oppressed classes retain an understanding of what they want and how they can gradually get more of it. By adding language to the inventory of power-preserving resources and attributing to linguistic manipulation the effect of paralyzing political consciousness, models of language as a political tool predict that some rulers will be able to destroy not only the opportunity but also the will for political freedom, making opposition permanently impossible. One manifestation of this popular servility would be a general acceptance of the very linguistic manipulation that promotes the acceptance of all other policies of the rulers.

3. The Newspeak model

3.1. Introduction

We find in 1984 a model of language as a political tool. Since Orwell's model is informal, and since critics and other readers have variously interpreted it, there is some uncertainty as to the body of assumptions that Orwell intended to communicate (see, e.g., Michea, 1984, pp. 15-20). We shall show, however, that what we call "the Newspeak model" is at least a reasonable inference from the text and the context of 1984.

Orwell in 1984 offered a few generalizations about language and political control, but in the main he left us to generalize from descriptions of the political role of Newspeak, the official language of the fictional empire of Oceania.

Newspeak, though Orwell's invention, is, like many other objects in his fiction (Crick, 1980, p. 256), a thinly disguised composite of things Orwell knew in real life. There are several linguistic entities with which Orwell was acquainted and which some features of Newspeak resemble. These include Esperanto (Crick, 1980, pp. 175, 189-191, 254-255; Michea, 1984, p. 13), the only widely used artificial language; Ogden and Richards's Basic English (Crick, 1980, p. 425), a subset of the English lexicon (850 words) and grammar promoted as an international language; journalists' cablese (Steinhoff, 1975, p. 169), a cryptic variety of written English used to reduce telegraph costs; ideas about language and languages espoused by other writers (Steinhoff, 1975, pp. 167-

168); and the usage of English in contemporary public affairs (Orwell, 1945). Two of these, however, namely Esperanto and the bureaucratic usage of English, account for the bulk of the features of Newspeak. The word structure of Newspeak bears an unmistakable similarity to that of Esperanto, at least as it would probably have been understood by Orwell. Although he did not speak Esperanto, he heard it spoken and heard about it from enthusiastic friends, fellow party activists, employers, housemates, and relatives who did. And the semantics of Newspeak caricature the way organization men speak and write English, at least as their critics perceive this usage. Newspeak can be described without much distortion as a language created by grafting features of Esperanto morphology onto bureaucratic English.

Newspeak, then, is not a product of pure fantasy. Its features, even if sometimes exaggerated, are found in existing languages. Orwell's claims about the possibility and the effects of such features in a language can therefore, at least in part, be tested against empirical evidence, not merely against the results of speculation. First let us try to codify these claims.

3.2. General assumptions

There are two general assumptions in the Newspeak model. These are assumptions it shares with all models of language as a political tool. Let us state them more precisely than we have above:

- (A) For every language, there are changes in features of the language which, if they take place, will cause changes in the ability of speakers of the language to reason about politics.
- (B) Under some conditions every state has the ability to cause changes of the kind described in (A).

3.3. Specific assumptions

3.3.1. Introduction

The Newspeak model is distinguished from other models of language as a political tool by its specific assumptions. These answer five questions about the general assumptions above:

1. Which changes in any language will cause changes in the ability of speakers of that language to reason about politics?
2. Which changes in this ability will those linguistic changes cause?
3. Which speakers' ability to reason about politics will be so changed?
4. Which of these linguistic changes can any state cause?
5. Under which conditions can a state do so?

3.3.2. Linguistic changes affecting political thought

Orwell described with some care a number of changes in linguistic features that were taking place in English, the traditional dominant language of Oceania. He leaves the clear impression on us (though he only illustrated rather than stated the generalization) that each change he described was assumed to have an independent and additive effect on the ability of speakers of a language to reason about politics. Our Newspeak model thus assumes that all linguistic changes of the kinds that transformed English into Newspeak will affect political reasoning. Let us then survey these changes.

3.3.2.1. Minor changes

In some ways, Newspeak did not differ, or differed only slightly, from English. It is because of these minor differences that we can reasonably call Newspeak a reformed English rather than an entirely new language.

The rules for forming sentences and higher-order utterances (paragraphs, essays, speeches, etc.) were substantially the same in Newspeak and English. Newspeak did, however, presumably unlike English, have a prestige style of speaking that was "gabbling", "staccato", and "monotonous" (Orwell, 1949, p. 253).

The pronunciations of some words were altered to make them easily pronounceable, euphonic, short, rapidly utterable, unstressed, harsh-sounding, and ugly (Orwell, 1949, p.253). Orwell did not explicate how a word could be both euphonic and ugly. We assume "euphony" means compatibility of pronunciation (i.e., ease of pronunciation not only in isolation but also in any sequence where the word might grammatically occur), rather than beauty. For the most part, however, Newspeak pronunciation was (presumably) identical to that of English.

Newspeak spelling, too, differed only slightly from that of English. In particular, "occasionally . . . , for the sake of euphony, extra letters were inserted into a word . . ." (Orwell, 1949, p. 249).

In some important ways, then, Newspeak was a conservative language. To the small extent that it differed from English in style, syntax, pronunciation, and spelling, the main reason for changing the language was to make it possible for its speakers to speak more easily, quickly, and mechanically.

The simplification and mechanization of speech which Newspeak introduced may have been inspired by what Orwell knew (or believed) about Esperanto. Advocates of Esperanto typically claim that the one-to-one correspondence of its sounds to its letters, and the uniform stress on the next-to-last syllable of every word, make it possible to pronounce any word correctly without hesitation. Critics of Esperanto often infer from these features that the language has no redundancy, making it unfit for normal conversation, or that it has no stylistic variability, making it unfit for creative writing (Tonkin, 1968).

3.3.2.2. Changes in Meaning

Newspeak radically changed two aspects of the English language. One of these was the meanings of words. We can summarize the differences under five categories. First, most words (e.g., "free" and "equal") had only one sense in Newspeak, rather than several senses from which one would be implied by context, as in English. Second, all political words in Newspeak had evaluative connotations, which could be positive, negative, or dual. Words of the last type, such as "blackwhite" and "duckspeak", had contrary senses that had to be distinguished by context. Third, some words in Newspeak had meanings, either general (e.g., "sexcrime") or specific (e.g., "crimestop"), which no single words in English had. Fourth, some meanings expressible with single words in English (e.g., "science" and "democracy") were not expressible with any words or phrases in Newspeak. And, fifth, the meanings of many political phrases were separated from their etymologies by the practice of abbreviating them into single "telescoped" words made of fragments of the words in the original phrases (e.g., "Minipax").

Some of these features of Newspeak semantics (Orwell, 1949, pp. 159, 174-175, 246-247, 250-252, 254-255) resemble Orwell's earlier (1945) description of the manipulation of the meanings of words by persons who subordinate truth to a partisan or bureaucratic interest. In 1984 he noted that telescoped words were in common use in the real world, especially "in totalitarian countries and totalitarian organizations" (Orwell, 1949, p. 252).

Other semantic features have some similarity to Esperanto. The assignment of just one meaning to each word in the nonpolitical vocabulary could have been inspired by Esperanto's tendency (Witkam, 1983, sec. IV.4.4) to use separate words to distinguish what are homonyms in the principal source languages for its vocabulary (e.g., "evolui" vs. "riveli" for the political and photographic meanings, respectively, of "develop", "developper", or "entwickeln"). Esperanto also has some words which, like "crimethink", take the place of a large set of words in its source languages; an example is "bleki", which covers "neigh", "meow", "moo", "chirp", "oink", and every other act of animal vocalization.

3.3.2.3. Changes in derivation and inflection

3.3.2.3.1. Derivation and inflection in English

The other area of radical change from English to Newspeak was derivation and inflection. The rules of derivation allow a word to be changed in order to change its meaning or its syntactic role. Changing a noun to a verb, or an intransitive verb to a transitive verb are examples of derivation. Inflection rules allow a word to be changed in order to change what might be called its syntactic sub-role: a more grammatical and less semantic change. Examples of inflection are changing a singular noun to a plural one or a present-tense verb to a past-tense one.

In English, and generally in natural languages that have inflection, derivation rules are more idiosyncratic and less generally applicable than inflection rules (Lehmann, 1976, p. 141). For example, it could not have been safely

predicted that "deep-six" would be derived to mean "kill a P.O.W. by drowning without formal authorization", but, once it was derived, it could be safely predicted that the forms "deep-sixed", "deep-sixes", and "deep-sixing" would be inflected from it. Derivational affixation, too, is less than regular; take the sometime coexistence of "politize" and "politicize", "monolingual" and "unilingual", or "racialism" and "racism".

Given the optionality inherent in many derivation rules, who decides how new meanings will be expressed? In English, no one person or organization makes more than a trivially small proportion of these decisions. New English words and phrases, such as "Debategate" and "affirmative action", are derived by many independent speakers and writers, and they rise and fall in currency as a matter of consensus in the speech community.

Even though the inflection rules of English can be thoroughly described, they are complex. It must sometimes, for example, be specified on a word-by-word basis whether an adjective is inflected for the comparative degree with "-er" ("yellower") or "more" ("more chartreuse"), or how a verb is inflected for the past tense ("hung a picture" vs. "hanged a murderer").

3.3.2.3.2. Derivation and inflection in Newspeak

3.3.2.3.2.1. Regularity

Newspeak's break with English derivation and inflection can be described as four simultaneous revolutions. First, Newspeak's rules were much more regular than those of English. The regularity lay in a near-elimination of exceptions. The inflection of plural nouns ("mans"), comparative adjectives ("gooder"), and past-tense verbs ("thoughted") was completely regular. As Orwell undoubtedly knew, such regularity is one of the hallmarks of Esperanto, which has, like its main source languages, inflections but has completely regularized them.

3.3.2.3.2.2. Simplicity

The second revolution was simplicity, which took the form of adopting a single rule for each function, rather than a multiplicity of conjugations, declensions, nominalization suffixes, etc. Thus, the only rule for deriving an adjective from a noun was to attach the suffix "-ful" to it ("crimeful", "thoughtful", "speedful", as opposed to "criminal", "thoughtful", "speedy"). Likewise, Esperanto typically has only one rule for each function. In the case of deriving an adjective from a noun, the rule is to remove the noun ending "-o" and replace it with the adjective ending "-a". The parallel examples are the adjectives "krima", "penso", and "rapida", corresponding to the nouns "krimo", "penso", and "rapido".

3.3.2.3.2.3. Productivity

Thirdly, Newspeak revolutionized derivation and inflection by making them far more productive than in English. Productive rules are rules that can still be applied to create new words. Newspeak made all rules productive, abolishing idiomatic restrictions on their applicability. For example, the opposite of a word was not only derived by a rule rather than idiosyncratically (regularity);

and it was not only derived by just one rule (simplicity); but it could be derived by that rule from every word in the language (productivity), allowing each speaker potentially to create new words with this rule. The rule in Newspeak was to prefix the work with "un-". A word of any part of speech could be transformed, again by a single rule, into any other part of speech.

As a by-product of this productivity, Newspeak was able to discard a large proportion of its word bases. Thus, from the set of words designating various degrees and directions of an attribute (e.g., "scorching/hot/warm/cool/cold/freezing") only one needed to be kept, since the rest could be derived from it by affixes (e.g., "doubleplusuncold").

Such unrestricted productivity is a well advertised feature of Esperanto. When Orwell says (1949, p. 248) that "Given . . . the word good, there was no need for such a word as bad, since the required meaning was equally well--indeed, better--expressed by ungood", he could have been quoting verbatim a typical sales pitch for Esperanto. To illustrate, here are some Esperanto words derived with the opposite-creating prefix "mal-", their likely Newspeak translations, and their English translations:

<u>Esperanto</u>	<u>Newspeak</u>	<u>English</u>
malsupro	untop	bottom
malvenko	unwin	defeat
malhela	unlight	dark
maldekstra	unright	left
malbone	ungoodwise	poorly
malsame	unsamewise	differently
malŝpari	unsave	waste
maltrinki	undrink	urinate
male	unwise	on the contrary

3.3.2.3.2.4. Authority

Newspeak's revolutions in regularity, simplicity, and productivity did not eliminate the need for continual regulation. Although many rules (e.g., pluralization) could be carried out unerringly by any educated Newspeak speaker, others were ambiguous because they required weighing competing desiderata. Orwell's main examples are the choice of which superfluous word to throw out (e.g., "light" or "dark"), the choice of how to coin a "telescoped" political term, and the occasional conflict between regularity of derivation and euphony of pronunciation (Orwell, 1949, p. 249). In all such cases, the state, operating through an "enormous team of experts" at the "Research Department", exercised total authority, with the "Newspeak dictionary" being the codification of its commands (Orwell, 1949, p. 43).

3.3.2.4. Linguistic changes: general description

We can now generalize from the changes Orwell described Newspeak as introducing into English. These changes:

- made words easier to pronounce,
- reduced the number of meanings per word,
- made all political words evaluative,

introduced words with new political meanings, eliminated ways to express existing political meanings, created new political words by telescoping existing phrases, and made the derivation and inflection of words:

regular,
simple,
productive, and
controlled by a central authority.

Is it, then, reasonable to read 1984 as assuming that any linguistic reform that accomplishes any changes of one or more of these kinds will have an impact on the political reasoning ability of the speakers of the language? Orwell may have thought that some of these changes were active ingredients and others were flavoring, but he did not mark any of them clearly as inert. So we shall define the Newspeak model as assuming that each change of these kinds has an impact on the ability to reason about politics.

We shall, however, discriminate between the two domains of semantics and morphology, paying more attention to the latter. Our reasoning is based on the generalization that the lexicon of a language changes more rapidly and as a result of more diffuse influences than its morphology (e.g., Langacker, 1973, pp. 180, 193). Thus, even if a state imposed a language with Newspeak's lexicon and morphology on its citizenry, the lexicon would soon begin to change through borrowing and innovation. But the morphology would last for years with little need for maintenance efforts by the state. This is especially so for Newspeak because one of the main reasons for morphological change is spontaneous regularization of irregular forms (e.g., "striven" --> "strived") by those acquiring competence in the language, but in Newspeak almost no such irregularities were left.

3.3.3. Impacts on political reasoning

The Newspeak model assumes that changes of the foregoing kinds cause a diminution in the ability of speakers of the language to reason about politics. If the changes are major, the diminution will also be major. It is even possible for political reasoning ability to be totally eliminated by changes of these kinds. As a first approximation, then, these changes bring about a kind of political idiocy. In the case of Newspeak, its final replacement of English was expected to put an end to political reflection, discussion, recollection, and doubt. Newspeak was "an almost foolproof instrument" to permit a person to "spray forth the correct opinions as automatically as a machine gun spraying forth bullets." "Ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centers at all" (Orwell, 1949, pp. 253-254). The learning of reasoning skills developed by previous generations would be inhibited by the unintelligibility of written political English to persons literate only in Newspeak, and by the nontranslatability of English political texts into Newspeak. As Orwell (1949, pp. 255-256) put it, "the last link with the past would have been severed."

More precisely, these linguistic changes yield a combination of idiocy and brilliance: the crippling of most abilities to reason about politics but the

enhancement of some. Speakers of Newspeak would resemble excellent political debaters in their ability to give an instantaneous and perfectly appropriate reply to any assertion or question. But this would be a technical skill, given that there would be only one correct reply. Speakers would be unable to think about choices among strategies for achieving political goals, or about choices among goals themselves. Newspeak would thus turn each speaker into a particular kind of idiot savant.

3.3.4. Persons subject to linguistic control

The Newspeak model follows Orwell's account in assuming that certain kinds of persons are more susceptible than others to the linguistic manipulation of their political reasoning abilities. The least susceptible targets in Oceania were those who merely lived there and only heard Newspeak spoken. The latter (the "proles") had little political interest or knowledge, but their apathy was not a result of any changes in language (Orwell, 1949, pp. 60-62).

It was the users of Newspeak who suffered linguistic impacts. These were the educated, the literate, and the politically participant. They included those who, except for their inability to think, might have been called intellectuals. They also included Party workers and functionaries in the state administration. Among these, the more fluent a person was in Newspeak, and the less fluent in English, the more serious were the impacts of Newspeak on the person's ability to think. A fluent speaker and writer of the language could be robotized by it even in the presence of dissident social influences. When such a person spoke Newspeak, "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, 1949, pp. 45-48, 255).

Thus the Newspeak model assumes that the kinds of linguistic changes described above inhibit political reasoning most effectively among those who learn most successfully and most exclusively to speak and write under the changed rules.

3.3.5. Vulnerable linguistic features

As we already indicated, Orwell selected some features of language (e.g., derivation) for radical state manipulation and allowed others (e.g., spelling) to be nearly untouched by the inventors of Newspeak. There is no explanation in 1984, however, for this distinction. If Orwell meant to imply that state could successfully alter only the features of a language that were manipulated in the creation of Newspeak, he did not say so. In addition, he left it unstated whether the maximum degree of manipulation is what was manifested in Oceania. For example, could a state abolish language altogether? Could it, rather than reforming the existing dominant language, totally replace it with an unrelated language? And, if so, could the new official language be an entirely a priori artificial language rather than a natural one? Since we don't know Orwell's answers to these questions, we define the Newspeak model as assuming merely that at least all the features that Newspeak changed are vulnerable to change through state policy.

3.3.6. Conditions for language control

Orwell implied in 1984 that under certain political conditions a state could bring about the kinds of linguistic changes we have described above. He did not, however, state whether the conditions obtaining in Oceania were necessary, sufficient, or both. In fact, while suggesting that one of the linguistic changes (the introduction of telescoped words) is promoted by "totalitarian" institutions (Orwell, 1949, p. 252), he indicated that another (the generalization of affixability) was characteristic of the (presumably non-totalitarian) countries where English was spoken before the establishment of Oceania (Orwell, 1949, p. 248).

Another problem Orwell did not resolve is whether a state can abolish words without first eliminating or at least attenuating the people's felt need to express the ideas to which those words refer. In fact, he seems to have contradicted himself on this question. The concept of political freedom no longer existed and was "therefore of necessity nameless"; however, certain crimes could no longer be committed "simply because they were nameless and therefore unimagineable" (Orwell, 1949, pp. 247, 255; cf. Traugott, 1983, p. 100).

The Newspeak model will here again avoid specificity, merely assuming that at least an absolutist one-party dictatorship can, at least under some conditions, bring about the kinds of linguistic changes described above.

3.4. Implications

The Newspeak model presented above makes assumptions that yield two testable groups of propositions. First, they imply that linguistic reforms embodying the kinds of changes that Newspeak made in English can succeed. In other words, there are conditions under which at least some human institutions can make such changes in linguistic codes and cause important sections of whole populations to change their speaking and writing habits to conform to the new codes.

Second, the Newspeak model implies that the knowledge and/or use of a language with features like those of Newspeak will cause its users to lose some or all of their ability to reason about political issues. If we assume that knowledge and use each make a contribution to this loss of ability, then we should expect to find an association between each of these and the quality of political reasoning. All other things being equal, monolingual speakers of language A should reason more competently than monolingual speakers of language B if language B is more Newspeak-like than language A. Further, bilinguals who can equally use both A and B should be expected to reason more competently when using A than when using B.

Combining these predictions with our earlier ones from the broader class of models of language as a political tool, we can predict that authorities who succeed in imposing on their populations a language of political communication that shares the features of Newspeak will face little or no opposition ever again. And the linguistic alterations themselves will be one of the policies that are immune from opposition.

4. Is Newspeak possible?

4.1. Overview

One prediction following from the Newspeak model is that deliberate organized action can (under some conditions) change languages in the ways, and to the extent, that Newspeak changed English. Not surprisingly, we know of no attempt to introduce such a set of changes into any one language.

There have, however, been attempts to change and to create languages, and some of the features promoted by these attempts have resembled those of Newspeak. The main large-scale language policies have aimed to (1) increase the use of certain existing languages at the expense of others, (2) bring new languages into existence and use, and (3) reform languages. These purposes can be further subdivided, e.g. by distinguishing an increase in (a) the number of users of a language and (b) the range of subjects about which its users use a language to communicate (Fishman, 1982, p. 291).

The results of such attempts (see, e.g., Cooper, 1982; Rubin and Jernudd, 1971; Fishman, 1974) are mixed. There have been successes and failures in language policy. For example, Hebrew has been made to flourish as a national language, Irish has not. Esperanto has become a living language, Basic English has not. Ideograph simplification has been accepted by most users of standard Chinese, Romanization has not. The U.S. Air Force has gotten the American public to use the term "aerospace", but the Department of Defense has failed to persuade the public to replace "cost over-run" with "cost growth" (Skidmore, 1972, pp. 183-188).

The conditions of success and failure appear to be many and interacting. Some of the conditioning variables, such as public attitudes and the monitoring ability of agencies, are shared with most or all areas of policymaking. Others, such as the age specificity of language learning rates, are peculiar to language policy. There has been an attempt at a general positive theory of language policy optimization assuming costless implementation (Tauli, 1968), but we are far from a general behavioral theory of how desired features can be implanted into the speech habits of a population. Thus we simply cannot give a satisfactory answer to the question of how and when a Newspeak-like language could be a success.

In lieu of a general answer, let us consider the two examples we have already cited as presumptive inspirations for Newspeak: contemporary English and Esperanto.

4.2. The case of contemporary English

We itemized in section 3.3.2.2 five changes brought about by Newspeak in the relationships between words and their meanings. Contemporary American English usage arguably provides examples of all of these changes.

First, some words have, at least in some contexts, lost some of their former meanings, including the replacement of moral meanings with technical ones. Danet (1976) argues that the Watergate conspirators gave exclusively amoral

meanings to words which normally had moral meanings, such as "proper". The regulations of government departments often give technical definitions to terms that would otherwise have moral connotations, such as "self-dealing" (United States, 1979, pp. 82.1-85).

Second, it is well known that some political words have evaluative connotations. In addition to euphemisms and "sneer words" (see Safire, 1978), some words have, to some extent, contrary meanings that are evoked in different contexts. "Welfare" is an example, insofar as a laudatory or pejorative connotation is part of its meaning. Edelman (1977) argues that the most important political words typically have two opposite connotations, which users select from in response to cues from political leaders.

Third, there are words that express meanings that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to express before those words became part of the lexicon. An example of a term with a more general meaning than its predecessors is "national security" (as a noun) or "national-security" (as an adjective). An example of increased specificity is "frisk", a type of police search defined by the suspicions justifying it, the methods used, and the permitted dispositions of items found (Black, 1979, pp. 601, 1273).

Fourth, there have been meanings to which words once corresponded but which are no longer expressible, at least conveniently. These include varieties of collective action that were once described and delegitimated in unison, with such terms as "party", "conspiracy", and "sect" (e.g., Douglas, 1977, p. 36).

And fifth, words are occasionally created with the apparent purpose of obscuring their etymological meanings. Some of these are political or military, such as "cointelpro". Similarly, an organization often renames itself according to its initials when its original name no longer describes the purpose it wants to project; recent examples include NCR, which now makes computers as well as cash registers, and GEICO, which now insures low-risk clients generally, not only government employees. Typically, such renamings are accepted or even preceded by outsiders who talk about such organizations.

Given examples such as these, it is plausible that a one-party state intent on changing popular speech behavior in similar ways but to a greater extent could experience a substantial degree of success. At best, however, each such change that was promoted would have only a high probability rather than a certainty of taking root in mass behavior. And, as Traugott (1983) has pointed out, the effects of such efforts would continually erode, requiring eternal vigilance to maintain the desired level of conformity to the prescribed lexicon.

4.3. The case of Esperanto

4.3.1. Introduction

The value of Esperanto as evidence on the possibility of a Newspeak-like language lies in three facts: (1) the substantial resemblance of certain aspects of Esperanto to Newspeak, (2) the near absence of coercion in the spread of Esperanto, and (3) the success of Esperanto in achieving a transformation from proposal to living language.

4.3.2. Resemblance

We described in section 3.3.2.3 a number of similarities between the rules of derivation and inflection in Newspeak and Esperanto. Unlike the similarities between Newspeak and English semantics, Newspeak is not consistently more extreme in its derivation and inflection than Esperanto. In two respects--regularity and productivity--Esperanto is sometimes more extreme than Newspeak.

In Newspeak, regularity of inflection was not extended to include "the pronouns, the relatives, the demonstrative adjectives, and the auxiliary verbs" (Orwell, 1949, p. 249). In Esperanto, however, these are all inflected regularly (though we are only guessing what Orwell meant by "relatives"). In addition, some of the derivation rules in Newspeak were not applied as generally as the corresponding rules in Esperanto. For example:

<u>Newspeak</u>	<u>Esperanto</u>
I, my, me	mi, mia, min
you, your, you	vi, via, vin
who, what, where, when, why, how someone, something, somewhere, sometime, for some reason, somehow	kiu, kio, kie, kiam, kiel iu, io, ie, iam, iel
everyone, everything, everywhere, always, for every reason, in every way	ĉiu, ĉio, ĉie, ĉiam, ĉiel
love, hate	ami, malami
good, bad	bona, malbona

To an even greater extent than Newspeak, Esperanto can be classified as an agglutinative language, thus making it in one way resemble such languages as Turkish and Zulu more than it resembles the Indo-European languages (Wells, 1978, pp. 27-37), whose native speakers have always made up the majority of the Esperanto speech community. Thus in some ways Esperanto manifests the characteristic reforms of Newspeak to an even greater extent than does Newspeak itself. This conclusion is supported further if we consider regularity and simplicity applied to other aspects of the two languages. As noted above, Newspeak preserved the writing system of English almost unchanged. Esperanto, however, adopted a strictly phonemic orthography, something that would have corresponded to a radical spelling reform in English. Newspeak presumably also preserved the irregular stress of English, while Esperanto adopted one universally applicable rule to govern stress.

In addition to their grammatical resemblances, Newspeak and Esperanto have important historical similarities. Both languages began as schemes in the minds of designers--schemes to radically transform existing languages in order to achieve political purposes. Both languages can be called "semi-artificial" because of their origin as systematic yet incompletely formalized revisions of natural languages (Henle, 1958, p. 96). And both languages were promoted among a target population of adults who, arguably, had little free time to learn a second language and a diminished aptitude for doing so.

4.3.3. Coercion

An important difference between Esperanto and Newspeak lies in their unequal reliance on authority to maintain adherence to their rules. Esperanto, unlike Newspeak, has no de facto central giver or enforcer of speech and writing norms. Esperanto had such a central authority in the person of its designer, L.L. Zamenhof, from 1887, when he published its first teaching grammar, until 1912, when he formally relinquished his right to decide on proposed reforms of the language (Forster, 1982, p. 152). Since 1912, the Akademio de Esperanto and various writers, lecturers, and teachers have tried to exercise influence over the development of the language, but no single authority has been generally accepted or followed.

Thus, if a Newspeak-like language reform were to depend for its success on the use of physical or moral force to compel obedience, the fact that the Esperanto speech community has been largely free of such pressure for over 70 years suggests the existence of considerable organizational slack. If Esperanto can implement Newspeak-like features without central direction, similar linguistic changes should be at least as likely to succeed when coercion is available.

4.3.4. Success

Orwell wrote (1949, p. 246) that it was going to take about 65 years for Newspeak to replace English once the complete reference grammar and lexicon was promulgated. Is this timetable realistic? Esperanto became a living language in at most 18 years, from its release in 1887 (following several years of feasibility testing and revision) until the first world Esperanto congress in 1905. By then it had, and since then it has augmented, most of the attributes that usually make a language viable: speakers, writers, devotees, cultivators, and supportive institutions (especially voluntary associations, conferences, and publishing houses). In rough estimates, half a million persons now speak the language, two books a week are published in it, one hundred periodicals use it as their sole language of publication, and twenty international radio stations broadcast programs in it (Lapenna, 1974).

These indices of success suffice to show that Esperanto began to function as a language of human communication within two decades. To the extent that Esperanto has attributes of Newspeak, this evidence proves that a language with such attributes can work. And can such a language not only supplement, but also replace, natural languages? Esperanto has apparently never replaced all the other languages of any of its speakers. Although there have been a few hundred native speakers of Esperanto, there are no known Esperanto monolinguals. We think this, however, is merely a function of the fact that Esperanto is the language of a pure diaspora; there is no residential community where Esperanto is the dominant language. The evidence supports the assumption that monolingual Esperanto-speaking children would be raised in such a community if it existed.

4.4. Conclusion

We have shown that linguistic changes similar to the ones introduced by Newspeak can take place in human languages and that such changes can come to

characterize the speech and writing of people far beyond the circle of those who plan the changes. Even if Newspeak had made a more radical break with English than Orwell chose to describe, there are reasons to believe that large numbers of persons could learn to use it as a medium of communication in all domains. It also appears that neither a one-party dictatorship nor a waiting period of several generations is a prerequisite for the installation of a language with the grammatical regularity, simplicity, and productivity characteristic of Newspeak. The evidence, though not conclusive, supports the view that we should take Newspeak seriously. Given the apparent feasibility of such a linguistic reform, we should evaluate Orwell's claim that it would stifle political thinking.

5. Would Newspeak kill political thought?

5.1. Overview

If features like those of Newspeak made their way into the common language of a political community, would anything happen to the reasoning ability of its citizens? In particular, would this ability disappear?

The popular literature mentioned in section 2.4 typically claims that Newspeak (sometimes referred to by name) is already happening to political language and that this is to blame for the declining quality of political thought (e.g., Skidmore, 1972, p. 185), as well as increasing criminality (Pindell, 1983, p. 50) and other evils.

Experimental studies of linguistic form and its effects on perception and memory also tend to support the belief that a communicator's choice of words and syntax can substantially influence a reader's or listener's behavior. For example, the words used in a public opinion poll can make a major difference in the distribution of responses; the words used in questioning a witness can greatly alter what the witness recalls about an event; and the words used in promoting a political candidate or proposal can have a major effect on the public reaction (e.g., Bishop, Tuchfarber, and Oldendick, 1984; O'Barr, 1981, p. 403; Williams and Stabler, 1973).

The choice of words or other forms from among the repertoire offered by a language is, however, somewhat different from the alteration of the repertoire itself. For a ruler interested in suppressing the ability to reason about politics, it is not enough to use rhetoric skillfully; that would permit opponents to use similar rhetorical devices, too. Such a ruler, according to the Newspeak model, will want to redefine the language shared by the ruler, the ruled, and the opposition. What interests us, then, is the possibility that one language could render its users more deferential and less intellectual than another language.

5.2. Does Esperanto suppress political thought?

5.2.1. Interpersonal comparisons

The Newspeak-like features that permit the easiest comparisons between languages are the regularity, simplicity, and productivity of derivation and

inflection. It may be true that certain languages are semantically more akin to Newspeak than are other languages, but we are not confident that we can make such a comparison in a convincing way.

With respect to these grammatical variables, we think that Newspeak is obviously closer to Esperanto than to the Indo-European languages that Esperanto is mainly based on and whose native speakers, as we said above, make up most of the Esperanto speech community. If Esperanto could be shown to suppress its speakers' ability to reason about politics, some indirect evidence would be available to support the Newspeak model.

The aggregate behavior of the speakers of Esperanto does not clearly testify to any effects of the language on the thinking of those who learn it. In one study (Forster, 1982, pp. 320-326), Esperanto speakers in a European country were found slightly more nonconformist, on average, than the country's population as a whole. Further, the Esperanto movement's own political system has been characterized since its inception by acrimonious factional debate about principles, strategies, tactics, and linguistics. Deviance and disputatiousness do not imply high levels of reasoning ability, but they do support the belief that the persons in question are motivated to develop and exercise such ability.

5.2.2. Intra-personal comparisons

5.2.2.1. Method

To escape the possible confounding effects of biased self-selection into the Esperanto movement, it is also useful to check on the possibility that speakers of the language reason less well when using Esperanto than when using a natural Indo-European language which they also know. After all, by saying that Newspeak was "an almost foolproof instrument" Orwell implies that thinking ability will vary for a given individual depending on which language is being used.

A brief field experiment to explore the possibility of measuring such differences was conducted in July, 1984, at the 69th world Esperanto congress, held at the University of British Columbia. Persons attending the congress were approached unsystematically in public places and asked whether they knew how to read both Esperanto and English. If so, they were invited to fill out an anonymous questionnaire on the spot and return it to the investigator. The questionnaire contained two problems in political reasoning and a question on whether the respondent could more easily read Esperanto or English.

The first problem was given randomly in English or Esperanto. The two versions read:

English:

Every friend of a friend of Country A is a friend of Country A.
Every friend of an enemy of Country A is an enemy of Country A.
Every enemy of a friend of Country A is an enemy of Country A.
Country B is an enemy of a friend of an enemy of Country A.

Therefore (choose only the answer that logically follows):

- Country B is a friend of Country A.
- Country B is an enemy of Country A.
- It is not certain whether Country B is a friend or an enemy of Country A.

Esperanto:

- Ĉiu amiko de amiko de Lando A estas amiko de Lando A.
- Ĉiu amiko de malamiko de Lando A estas malamiko de Lando A.
- Ĉiu malamiko de amiko de Lando A estas malamiko de Lando A.
- Lando B estas malamiko de amiko de malamiko de Lando A.

Do (elektu nur la logike sekvan respondon):

- Lando B estas amiko de Lando A.
- Lando B estas malamiko de Lando A.
- Ne certas ĉu Lando B estas amiko aŭ malamiko de Lando A.

The correct answer to this question was assumed to be the third one, and the hypothesis to be tested is that those selecting this answer will constitute a smaller proportion of the respondents receiving the question in Esperanto than of those receiving it in English.

Whichever language the first question was given in, the second question was given in the other language. This question, slightly adapted from one used by Tversky and Kahneman (1981, p. 453), began as follows:

English:

It is expected that a certain disease will kill 600 persons. The ministry of health is considering two methods for opposing this disease. Which method do you prefer?

Esperanto:

Oni atendas ke certa malsano mortigos 600 homojn. La ministerio pri saneco konsideras du metodojn por kontraŭi tiun malsanon. Kiun metodon vi preferas?

The remainder of the question (always in the same language) took one of two forms, randomly selected:

English, form 1:

- Method A: it would save 200 persons.
- Method B: the chances are 1/3 that it would save 600 persons and 2/3 that it would save no one.

English, form 2:

- Method A: 400 persons would die.
- Method B: the chances are 1/3 that no one would die and 2/3 that 600 persons would die.

Esperanto, form 1:

- Metodo A: oni savus 200 homojn.
- Metodo B: la ŝancoj estas 1/3 ke oni savus 600 homojn kaj 2/3 ke oni savus neniun.

Esperanto, form 2:

[] Metodo A: 400 homoj mortus.

[] Metodo B: la ŝancoj estas 1/3 ke neniu mortus kaj
2/3 ke 600 homoj mortus.

The second question was assumed not to have a correct answer, but rather to measure the extent to which a person's preference between two policies can be manipulated by the way the choices are presented. Since in previous studies Method A has been found more popular among those receiving form 1 than among those receiving form 2, the hypothesis to be tested is that this effect will be stronger among those receiving the question in Esperanto than among those receiving it in English.

5.2.2.2. Results and interpretation

5.2.2.2.1. Logical reasoning

The results for the first problem are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Language and Logical Reasoning

Respondent better at English? Language of question:	Yes		No		All	
	Eng.	Esp.	Eng.	Esp.	Eng.	Esp.
Response (per cent):						
"friend" (incorrect)	18	32	21	39	19	35
"enemy" (incorrect)	9	19	12	13	10	16
"not certain" (correct)	73	49	68	48	70	49
(N)	(33)	(37)	(34)	(31)	(67)	(68)
Chi-square (incorrects pooled):	4.2		2.5		6.5	
Significance:	p < .05		p < .2		p < .02	

Consistent with the hypothesis, the proportion of correct answers was higher among those receiving the question in English than among those getting it in Esperanto. As would be expected, the advantage held by those receiving the question in English was greater among those who claimed to read English more easily than Esperanto, but it was present even among those who claimed to read Esperanto at least as easily as English. Given the fairly small number of respondents, however, we cannot place much confidence in the reliability of this latter result, since a difference between the English and Esperanto versions at least this great would occur by pure chance in from 10% to 20% of the samples of this size.

Were these results to hold true for larger samples, we would have to explain why, as relative competence in Esperanto increases, respondents are more likely not only to give the correct answer but also to give the incorrect "friend" answer. One explanation would rely on the associations that speakers probably perceive between each language and the concepts of friendship and animosity. Given that a much larger proportion of all speech and writing in Esperanto deals with "friendship" among countries and peoples than is the case in English, those reading the question in Esperanto may, for this topic, make assumptions about the investigator's expectations or about the most natural-

sounding answer different from those reading it in English, while such differences might fail to appear if the topic were different. If topic manipulation failed to alter the pattern, the observed difference might be attributed to an association between logical reasoning and language. Especially for non-native speakers of English, English tends to be learned for "instrumental" reasons, and Esperanto for "integrative" reasons (cf. Gardner and Lambert, 1972, pp. 11-16). English is typically used in problem-oriented contexts, Esperanto in literary and entertainment contexts. It is possible that, purely because of such differential experiences, respondents reason better when using English than when using Esperanto, and that they would do so regardless of the grammatical features of the two languages (cf. Laitin, 1977, p. 181). If so, we would still expect to be able to reduce the advantage with English by changing the topic to one that evokes problem-solving experiences commonly discussed in Esperanto.

These considerations help to warn us against confusing what might be called "structural effects" and "associational effects" of shifting between two languages. Our discussion of the Newspeak model up to now has, following Orwell, assumed that the suppression of political reasoning might result from the replacement of one language by another through structural effects--the effects of lexical and grammatical differences between the languages. It is possible, however, that a similar result could ensue from a language shift even when there are no lexical or grammatical differences that could account for it. The result might be due purely to associational effects--the different skills, activities, or orientations that speakers associate with the two languages. Bilinguals are often unable to do the same things in both languages, and the association between skill and language is often a result of historical accident rather than linguistic structure. Anyone who has studied a technical subject in a second language and then tried to use his native language to discuss the subject has experienced this phenomenon.

For rulers bent on suppressing political reasoning, associational effects would be good news. In addition to engineering a Newspeak-like language reform, they might be able to achieve their goal by officializing a language that has no association with critical political thought.

5.2.2.2.2. Resistance to presentation effects

The results for the second problem are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Language and Presentation Effects

Respondent better at English?	Yes		No		All	
Language of question:	Eng.	Esp.	Eng.	Esp.	Eng.	Esp.
Per cent selecting Method A:						
On form 1	74	43	53	47	65	44
(N)	(19)	(21)	(15)	(15)	(34)	(36)
On form 2	28	17	50	32	38	26
(N)	(18)	(12)	(16)	(19)	(34)	(31)
Phi:	.46	.27	.03	.15	.26	.19
Chi-square:	7.8	2.4	.03	.81	4.8	2.5
Significance: p <	.01	.2	.9	.5	.05	.2

Assuming that a complete presentation effect would mean all form-1 responses being Method A and all form-2 responses being Method B, we use phi to measure the extent of the presentation effect. Phi can range from -1 (a complete presentation effect in the opposite direction) through 0 (equal proportions of Method A on the two forms) to +1 (complete presentation effect).

As Table 2 shows, the data fail to support the expectations we derived from the Newspeak model. Although the responses within each group differed across forms consistently with prior findings on this presentation effect, the between-form differences were greater among those receiving the question in English, not among those receiving it in Esperanto. When we consider the two competence groups separately, however, we find that each group experienced a greater presentation effect in its better language.

This finding suggests that some respondents avoided succumbing to the presentation effect only by receiving the question in a language they could not fluently read. Such an interpretation must be tentative in light of the fact that several of the effects could easily have been due to pure chance. It is obvious, however, that neither susceptibility nor immunity to presentation effects is possible when one cannot understand the language being used. Likewise, neither conforming nor critical responses are possible when one cannot speak or write in the language understood by the audience.

5.3. Conclusion

The evidence is inconclusive as to whether the knowledge or use of Newspeak would inhibit political reasoning in its speakers. The aggregate behavior of Esperanto speakers exhibits a tendency toward critical political thinking. An exploratory field experiment found it no easier to distort choices under risk by presenting the alternatives in Esperanto than by presenting them in English. The experiment did discover an apparent tendency for persons knowing both these languages to perform better on a logical reasoning task in English than in Esperanto. The results suggest, however, that this effect may be eliminated when fluency is equalized or may result from the subjects' different experiences and associations with the two languages, rather than from the fact that Esperanto has grammatical similarities to Newspeak.

Before completing our tentative verdict on whether Newspeak would destroy the capacity for political reasoning, we must address the issue of learnability. Many political and professional elites use a difficult official language (either indigenous or foreign) as a barrier to competition. It is significant that Orwell, in defining the attributes of Newspeak, did not follow this model. Newspeak was defined as an easy language, a language that (at least in its final form) everyone would be able to master. In this sense, Newspeak was egalitarian. Further, to the extent that Newspeak required learning effort, no one was to be spared that effort. Newspeak was not, in other words, the officialization of the native speech of a group already enjoying political supremacy. Its effect on the balance of power between the English and the other nationalities making up the empire of Oceania could only be democratizing when compared with the obvious alternative of officializing English. Newspeak, in fact, can be seen as an indispensable tool for Oceania's policy of racial and regional nondiscrimination and its (not necessarily practiced) principle

of circulation between elites and masses. "Jews, Negroes, South Americans of pure Indian blood are to be found in the highest ranks of the Party In no part of Oceania do the inhabitants have the feeling that they are a colonial population ruled from a distant capital" (Orwell, 1949, p. 172).

Although the evidence to date on differences in reasoning ability as a function of grammatical differences is inconclusive, the evidence on differences in learnability as a function of grammatical differences is strong and unanimous. Numerous studies have shown that a given level of competence can be acquired faster in a semi-artificial language having a regular, simple, and productive derivation and inflection system than in a natural language, regardless of whether the latter belongs to the same family as the learner's native language. The learning-time ratios range from about 1:2 for simple conversation to about 1:30 for professional writing ability (Pool, 1981). Consequently, a citizen of Oceania aspiring to a high rank in the Party could be expected to master Newspeak in a small fraction of the time it would have taken to master English.

A language with a Newspeak-like grammar, then, whatever its structural or associational effects on political reasoning, would be a major force for political equality between ethnic groups and classes. As a language that masses could easily learn not only to understand but also to speak and write, it would also turn what is often a one-way channel of regime-to-citizen communication into a channel that citizens could use to voice and organize opposition. Granted that other forces might usually prevent such use of the language, at least the language itself would be a force for political competition rather than monopoly. Other simplified languages based on natural languages and used as instruments of dictatorial rule have later become both tools and symbols of democratic political development (e.g., Wurm, 1968). Newspeak, too, has the features that would allow it to be transformed into a language of liberation.

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