The Use and Misuse of Language in Orwell's *1984*

I. Language as a tool for freedom: thought, memory and human connection

— Language and individual identity

- To write is to say "I exist." Winston starts a diary to find his own voice again in a society where free expression is dangerous.
- The diary is a private space. In it he can record thoughts he could never say out loud.
- His first entries are hesitant, broken and repetitive. This shows how hard it is to express dissent when you are always being watched.
- He writes "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" again and again. Writing the words is already an act of rebellion.
- Winston writes for a reader who does not exist yet. He hopes that his testimony will outlive the Party.

— Language and collective memory

- Winston is drawn to the past, and especially to the words and objects that survive from it.
- In the pub, the old man's scattered memories suggest that ordinary people's spoken accounts could challenge the Party's official history. But he cannot tell a coherent story. This shows how fragile collective memory is.
- The nursery rhyme "Oranges and Lemons" passes down cultural heritage through speech. Its old-fashioned words, rhythm and music keep alive a world that existed before the Party.
- Mr Charrington seems to offer Winston a way back into this lost world. The rhyme and the glass paperweight are both symbols of continuity with the past.

— Language, intimacy and truth

- With Julia, language becomes personal. They share thoughts, feelings and experiences that the Party wants to erase.
- Their private conversations form an alternative to Party language.
- Their forms of resistance differ. Winston is intellectual and interested in history, while Julia is practical and focused on the present. Their attitudes to political language reflect this.
- The gap between public slogans and private speech shows how artificial the Party's language is.
- Language can create closeness and solidarity, not just obedience.

II. Language as a tool of power: the corruption of meaning

— Newspeak: making thought impossible

- Newspeak is the Party's most systematic attack on language. In Part I, Chapter 5, Syme explains that its aim is not to communicate better but to limit freedom of thought.

- How it works:
  It removes synonyms, antonyms and shades of meaning.
  It destroys vocabulary, so some ideas can no longer be expressed.
  It simplifies grammar and builds words with prefixes and suffixes (*ungood*, *plusgood*, *doubleplusgood*).
- The word *free* survives only in a narrow, practical sense (for example, "this field is free of weeds"). Its political and intellectual meanings disappear.

— Doublethink: attacking logic and truth

- The Party does not only delete words. It also reverses their meanings.
- The three slogans on the Ministry of Truth show this:
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  WAR IS PEACE
  FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
  IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

- These contradictions break ordinary logic. People must accept two opposite ideas at once.
- Doublethink means controlling your own mind on purpose. You must believe official statements even when they contradict what you see and remember.
- Language is cut off from reality and made to serve politics. Individuals must absorb the contradictions inside themselves.

— Propaganda and euphemism: manufacturing consent

- The names of the four Ministries say the opposite of what they do.
- Euphemism hides violence and makes oppression look like legitimate authority.
- Party slogans are simple, repetitive and easy to remember. They work through repetition, not argument.
- The Two Minutes Hate shows collective emotional manipulation. Propaganda aims at automatic reactions, not reflection.
- Goldstein and the Brotherhood show how political discourse invents enemies and directs public hatred.

Go further: Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946)

Orwell argues that political language often relies on:

- **euphemism**, to hide unpleasant realities;
- **vague, abstract wording**, to avoid responsibility;
- **ready-made phrases and clichés**, which replace original thought.

1984 can be read as a dramatisation of the dangers Orwell describes in this essay.

III. The ultimate corruption: destroying truth and resistance—

— Rewriting the past

- Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, where falsification is an official job.
- Documents are constantly rewritten so that the Party is always right. Original copies are destroyed, so nobody can check.
- The past becomes something that can be reshaped, not something fixed.
- Rewriting newspaper articles creates a false continuity between past and present.
- "Who controls the past controls the future": the Party's power depends on its monopoly over historical narratives.

— Language as psychological violence: O'Brien

- O'Brien's interrogation is the climax of the Party's linguistic project.
- The Party does not just want Winston to repeat its slogans. It wants him to believe them.
- O'Brien undermines Winston's trust in his own perceptions. The scene with the fingers shows the link between language, perception and reality being destroyed.
- Winston must accept that the Party decides what is true.
- Communication becomes a relationship of total domination, and language becomes a tool of torture.

— The final paradox: the Appendix

- "The Principles of Newspeak" is written in a calm, academic tone. This contrasts sharply with the emotional intensity of Winston's story.
- It is written in the past tense, which suggests a later point of view. This adds ambiguity to the novel's ending. Has the Party's regime ended?
- Whatever the answer, the Party's aim is clear: reduce vocabulary until dissent cannot be expressed.
- Without complex language, independent thought would disappear.