

Abstract

By considering the differences between oral and literate cultures, the thesis explores how the very nature of writing and written records, alongside their advantages, has introduced a certain divergence in human perception, thinking and knowledge and their relation to the external and internal world. The potential liabilities this creates are exploited by the Party in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and used as a means of establishing and maintaining their dominance. Language is one of their main tools, as well as a major concern in the novel. The thesis focuses on the following aspects and their relation to language: memory and records, time and change, and meaning and consciousness.

As opposed to the fleeting nature of spoken language, writing (and other kinds of records) allows words to exist as objects independent of their "speakers" and the context in which they were produced. The rapid advances in text production and literacy have enabled the creation of a vast body of records far greater and (ideally) more reliable than the capacity of individual memory. Apart from the obvious advantages, due to the permanence of texts and the prestige associated with literacy, there exists the notion that external records are superior to the memory of an individual. By encouraging this notion and at the same time having a complete control over records and therefore the ability to change them at will, the Party manages to invalidate individual memory and thus control the mind.

Writing also influenced the concept of time in literate societies, which gave rise the idea of time as a linear sequence of discrete units, similar to writing itself, and this notion became incorporated into the respective languages. That, in turn, desensitized the speakers to the perception of gradual change and brought about the idea of a fixed, unchanging truth and consequently the emergence of competing ideologies. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, those are represented by the division of the entire world into three superpowers, although they are all very much the same. Within each state, there exist only two conflicting ideologies – in the case of Oceania represented by the faces of Big Brother and Emmanuel Goldstein. Specific meaning is suppressed by the use of Newspeak and only an undifferentiated, blind, emotion is encouraged that can be externally manipulated and turned into either love (i.e. devotion to Big Brother) or hatred (for anything else). All that makes the Party members completely detached from perceivable reality and from conscious processes, and thus unable to change anything about it, as the novel's protagonist attempts in vain.

If reality is the starting point to which both thinking and language relate, then reality and thinking about it can be brought together and expressed by language. But if the starting point is the arbitrary, unnatural, manipulative language Newspeak, then reality and thinking are pulled apart by it. Similarly, if the starting point is dogmatic thinking, then it is reality and language that are pulled apart.