

Consciousness and language in george orwell's 1984



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Newspeak is the official language of Oceania. It is the depletion of words. The Party wanted to make it impossible to commit thoughtcrimes by literally erasing all of the negative words that one would use. Oldspeak is what Winston and the proles spoke in. By 1984, most people had abandoned Oldspeak. The Party did not bother teaching the proles the new language because they didn't care about them. The proles have a conscience but they are not conscience of their consciousness. Winston could not bring himself to use Newspeak because he still had a sense of emotions that did not exist in Newspeak. Winston can still remember and thinks he can feel a sense of family, love, and guilt. The only emotions other people felt were pain, hatred and loyalty to the Party. Speaking in Oldspeak was a sign of consciousness. Throughout the book Winston grew to a stronger sense of awareness. The memories he began to acquire made him realize the lies the Party told. Winston was able to recall his memories because he used language and thought. The party believed Proles and animals are free. They were free to use thought and Oldspeak. They are somewhat conscious of themselves. Proles don't care about anything the Party would call important, so they are allowed to think what they want without having to fear the Party. They are allowed to think what they want. They are allowed to marry whom they want and spend their time how they please. This leads the reader to assume that although they are not educated, they have some sort of decision making process. Even if they do not make use of it they have it. On page 71, the book explains that the Proles needed to be kept in subjection, but they were not necessarily watched. The Party felt no need to keep to harsh of a watchful eye on them because they weren't smart enough to be a threat to the Party; and if one had become risk, one would be killed. The way they

were controlled was being occupied by beer and gambling. The Proles were free to marry whom they wanted. This shows they are conscious of feelings towards another Human being. They have a sense family. They did not call each other comrades like the Party. They raised their children without preparing them for the Party. This meant that the children were less likely to turn on their parents. The Party did not marry a person based on their emotional feelings, they married someone convenient. In fact, Party members were not allowed to marry if they had been attracted to their partner. On page 70, Winston writes in his diary, " Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious". Winston believes they are not free. You cannot be liberated without consciousness. Therefore, the Proles will never be conscious. However, the proles are conscious because they speak in Oldspeak, they just have a different type of consciousness than Winston. They are conscious of making decisions such as choosing a spouse. They own their own businesses and spend their days how they please. Winston is conscious in a different way. He is aware of the lies of the Party. On page 135 he says, " In this game we are playing, we can't win". Winston is conscious that the Party will always prevail. He doesn't know how much control they can actually have yet, but he knows eventually him and Julia will lose. They know it is a matter of time before they are found out by the Thought Police. He acknowledges that by saying, " we are dead". She replies, " we are not dead yet". He knows that the Party will always win but that they are always wrong. He has memories from before the Revolution, before the Party ruled. He knows things that the Party says are wrong. For example, when they tell the people that they have always been at war with

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Eurasia, they believe it. Although just the day before they knew they were at peace with Eurasia and their enemy was Eastasia. This is because the people of Oceania used Double Think. Winston was conscious of Double Think and therefore knew he could not believe two contradictory ideas. When Winston was captured by the Thought Police he was forced to "relearn" everything. Once Winston succumbs to O'Brien by giving in to double thinking and the Party, he loses his consciousness. Winston wonders if he is the insane one since he finds himself to be the only one to have these thoughts. Winston is conscious of how the Party uses language to manipulate the people. He understands that, for example, "war" and "peace" are two contradictory ideas. The Party, however, does not. This is how Winston is different than the Party. He understands Double Think. He knows that in language there is something greater than orthodoxy. Winston longs to be able to think and behave how he pleases. Orthodoxy is the main belief of the Party. Fully sharing in their beliefs and views is the ultimate form of unconsciousness. Almost everything that the Party said was a lie or a contradiction. For example their slogans, "WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH". Certainly we can see how ridiculous these statements are but to the Party members they made perfect sense. The slogans are normal to them because they don't understand what "peace", "freedom", or "strength" truly means. Peace never existed because they were always at war with someone. No one is free, they cannot even think freely without getting found by the Thought Police. The strength and power was held entirely by the Inner Party. The government manipulated the people by using mind games and word play. An announcement plays explaining that the chocolate ration will be raised to twenty grams a week. The day before the

announcement said that the ration will be reduced to twenty grams. No one caught it besides Winston. Everyone accepts whatever is fed to them by the Party. The depletion of language parallels the idea of the depletion of consciousness. Human beings have the ability to think in language. If we are not capable of language then we are not truly conscious. The Party's goal was to eliminate words to make thoughtcrime impossible. If there were no words to express it, they believed, then no one would be able to convey it. Syme tells Winston, "the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought" (53). If language is being narrowed, then consciousness is being decreased. Winston understands this, therefore, he cannot bring himself to speak the new language. The people do not even think when they speak. They speak with their mouths not with their brains. Winston calls it, "noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck" (58). They don't know what they are even saying because no words have real meanings. People don't feel any complex emotions. They cannot even think what they want because their opinions will be known to the Thought Police. To indoctrinate the children to be loyal to the Party, they were only taught Newspeak. This made them easy targets of manipulation. They grew up never learning love for their family members or "comrades". The Party wants the people like this so that no one will share ideas. If you are intimate with another person, you will feel comfortable to share ideas with one another. The people could not even choose a spouse whom they were attracted to because loyalty and love was to be felt for Big Brother only. This made the people easy to control. Power was the most important thing to the Party. When a person was caught committing a Thought Crime, they were not captured to be punished, they were captured to be "cured". The Party would

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drain the person until there was nothing left, and then they would fill their minds with the beliefs of Big Brother, and they would truly become unconscious. Works Cited Orwell, George. 1984. New York: New American Library, July 1950.