

Language and political reality: George Orwell reconsidered

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Abstract. The domain of reference of political discourse is not autonomous from language; this domain is a construct generated by the discourse itself. Such an approach to the relation between language and political reality was expressed in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Concepts of modern semantics and pragmatics allow to explicate how language acts as both a form of constructing reality and a special type of social verbal behaviour. Language has become exclusively modal and intentional; any utterance expresses the relations of obligation, possibility, etc. and may be interpreted in intensional and, hence, in referentially non-opaque contexts. However, the semantics does not lose its referential force. In contrast, this force is multiplied, becoming a transworld relation. In this respect, the semantics of political discourse is akin to poetic semantics; however, the multidimensionality of the signified referents is hidden because referential discourse is a precondition for effectiveness. Political discourse, as a description of "world as it is", presupposes a hidden reference to other modal contexts "world in the future" (or "in the past"); "how the world should be" (or "should not be"), etc. The domain of the interpretation of political discourse is a set of possible worlds.

Keywords: political reality, language in political function, political discourse, Orwell's linguistic theory, Newspeak, doublethink, multiple reference, possible world semantics

1. In modern linguistics and philosophy, language is considered a mechanism and way of constructing reality rather than a means of describing reality. The various

uses of language that correspond to a variety of social functions create different types of reality or, more precisely, different representations of reality. Some versions of reality can be detached from language (for example, physical reality). Other “realities” exist solely as semiotic constructions, similar to poetic worlds. However, it is obvious in both cases that (1) the representation of reality does not exist apart from the language describing this reality, and that (2) any reality acquires some socially significant meaning and value only if expressed by linguistic means.

“Political reality” can also be viewed in a similar manner. This reality is certainly not reduced to language rules only; however, fundamentally, this reality cannot be expressed without these rules. Political reality cannot exist apart from the language by which this reality is described. The issue of “language and political reality” can be observed on three levels:

(1) *Stylistic*. This level is the case when the information (description of the situation) inherently carries its evaluation, for example, the information concerning a conflict between two armed groups can be represented either as an attack of extremists on the forces of law and order or as a reaction of citizens against occupants.

(2) *Manipulative (or rhetorical)*. This level is the case when, under the guise of information, the addresser imposes his own view on the information, which can cause both direct and indirect misinformation, i.e., something that occurs in the process of description is so transformed that the addressee receives a distorted representation of event:

It is a type of usage of natural language, and can be identified only through notions like goals, intentions, and broader aspects of pragmatic processing, which, in turn, explain the quantitatively high presence of some formal features (some types of argument schemes and fallacies, some semantically loaded expressions, some connotative words etc.) because they are of some help in achieving the speaker’s goal. (Saussure 2005: 119)

The language means of the first level have been studied more thoroughly than the means of the second level. However, both levels have been considered since ancient rhetoric, as well as by modern rhetoric which deals with “intertextual relations and social operation of texts as integral semiotic entities” (Lotman 1992 : 167). Both of these levels presuppose the existence of a reality that is independent of language. The role of language is reduced to its packaging, which is either adequate or intentionally/unintentionally distorting. Yet does political reality really exist? If so, then what is the form of existence of that political reality independent of language?

(3) *Semantic*. A possible answer to these questions requires the postulation of a third level, where the language appears as both a form of constructing and interpreting reality and a special type of social verbal behaviour. As mentioned by the prominent American political scholar Murray Edelman,

It is language about political events and developments that people experience, even events that are close by take their meaning. So political language *is* political reality; there is no other so far the meaning of events to actor and spectators is concerned... (Edelman 1985: 10)

Description of that deeper level where language rules are interlaced with behaviour norms (social interaction) can be labelled as discourse. Such an approach is based on the Wittgensteinian notion of 'language-game' ("I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language-game.'" PI Par. 7). We shall not discuss other possible conceptions of discourse because a comparison of these options would be the subject of separate research. However, having in mind the double ambiguity of the concepts 'discourse' and 'political' (cf. Wilson 2001) and to avoid possible misunderstandings let us explicitly refer to the definition in which the social-context-dependence of political discourse is mentioned:

Since people and their practices may be categorized in many ways, most groups and their members will occasionally (also) 'act politically', and we may propose that 'acting politically', and hence also political discourse, are essentially defined *contextually, viz., in terms of special events or practices* of which the aims, goals or functions are maybe not exclusively but at least primarily political. This excludes the talk of politicians outside of political contexts, and includes the discourse of all other groups, institutions or citizens as soon as they participate in political events. Such a contextual definition at the same time suggests that the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures. (Van Dijk 1997: 15)

2. On the third semantic level mentioned above 'the reality' (the signified) is equal to 'the language' (the signifier), and the genetic roots of political action are revealed, i.e., its origin in myth and rite. On this level, there are special rules of language behaviour. These rules are "masked" as common (ostensibly communicative and informative) verbal behaviour but actually pursue other objectives, "they are not made to advance knowledge, but to achieve some political success" (Popper 2002[1957]: 21). Thus, such behaviour is neither the communication nor the description of some state of affairs, but, first of all, is an impetus for transition from one state of affairs to another. When the language is used for political purposes, in contrast to its referential usage, the main semantic criterion of utterance is not the truth value (its correspondence to reality, being true or false) but its felicity, appropriateness and effectiveness. Thus, political utterances, regardless of their form, can be reduced to imperatives. Therefore, the criterion by which the command "Leave the room!" is evaluated is not the proposition itself but its result, i.e., whether the addressee went out and whether this action corresponds to the situation. The command itself is an

action, a certain model of behaviour that is both realized and described through speech. The evaluation of the utterance is transformed into the evaluation of action, i.e., whether the addresser has the right to make the addressee leave the room, whether the action is legal or purposeful, and, finally, whether the action corresponds to the accepted norms. Political discourse cannot be exhausted by the description of what is “said”; political discourse should consider by whom, when and where the statement was made. However, in contrast to “pure” performatives, on the one hand, political discourse cannot always be formalized as a certain required procedure. For example, declaration of war presupposes a certain procedure (as a rule, President’s/Prime Minister’s appeal to the Parliament or President’s decree ratified by the Parliament). Yet the same consequences can be ascribed to discourses not formalized as “war declarations” (a politician’s provocative speech, excitation of a military atmosphere, announcing of a general mobilization, etc.). On the other hand, political discourse, which is an imperative in its purpose (“Do it so ...”) evades such a grammatical form, masking as either a neutral description of the indicative mood of a neutral description (“Normal people act so”) or a persuasive statement of the subjunctive mood (“It would be better if...”).

2.1. The theory of political discourse cannot be reduced to referential semantics; it must be accomplished by the pragmatic theories describing operational and contextual semantics of political discourse – as resulting from the peculiar language-game. Political discourse is speech as action (rather than only a description of the action). For instance, it is obvious that declaring war is a speech act that not only describes some political action of declaration of war but also is the action itself. Without this speech act, military operations, even if present, are not formally considered a ‘war’. However, if such an act was performed and if there was no formal renunciation of the act, then the parties are considered to be in a state of war, regardless of whether there are military operations. On the one hand, the situation of ‘undeclared war’ or ‘actual war’, when there are military operations without a formal declaration of war, and in contrast, the situation of ‘phoney war’, when the absence of military operations does not annul the state of war but only transforms the state of war into the subtype of ‘phoney war’.

Thus, the meaning and sense of political discourse are not restricted to the meaning and sense of the uttered words but to the consequences of the action. In terms of contemporary linguistics and logic, we should consider the force of utterance, i.e., the three semantic and pragmatic forces or planes of political discourse, which are described as speech acts: (1) what does the utterance itself express, i.e., its semantic and linguistic content; (2) what influence does the addresser intend to have on the addressee; and, finally, (3) what influence did the utterance have on the addressee. Moreover, in political discourse these factors are often formalized as compulsory procedures or conditions of speaking. Therefore, the theory of speech acts must be

completed by that of performatives, when the parameters of the communicative context (compulsory “felicitous conditions”) should be given an explicit description. Thus, the utterance “I sentence you to a year’s imprisonment” has its static linguistic meaning, regardless of by whom, when and in what circumstances the utterance was made. However, the utterance acquires an adequate communicative value only when publicly uttered by a judge in a court of law and in the presence of an audience required by the procedure. Without complying with these conditions, the utterance, although having a linguistic meaning, makes no sense (or is, at best, irrelevant). This rule is also true for those utterances that are not formally proper performatives. The semantics of a statement (its truth value) is not determined by its correspondence to the reality but by the extent to which its production and evaluation meet the conditions required by the appropriate procedure. The decisive factor is the compliance with the rite (procedure); thus, the Parliament’s decision is valid if the decision was made in accordance with the procedure described in some regulations. However, the same statement will not be considered valid if, for example, the statement was removed from its fixed place and made at an inappropriate time.

Restating Alfred Tarski (1944), with respect to political discourse, the semantic rule “The utterance ‘*Snow is white*’ is true if snow is white” may be complemented by the indication of whether all of the conditions were met:

The proposition “Snow is white” is true if in compliance with a certain procedure, in a certain place and time, the required majority of those individuals present state “Snow is white”; thus, this statement is a true proposition.

Will snow become black if more than 50% of those individuals present vote for the proposition “Snow is black”? Of course not. However, the proposition “Snow is black” will acquire the status of a normative statement,¹ even for those individuals who voted against the proposition.

¹ A normative statement may be defined as an utterance that includes the statement of its truth as a modal frame: “Somebody considers proposition “P” to be true”. That is why its truth value, in compliance with both Frege’s principle of compositionality and the theory of propositional attitudes, must be evaluated with regard to this frame. Thus, the proposition “Snow is white” is true if snow is white. However, a proposition such as *The parliament of N... considers that snow is black* is a true proposition if the parliament of N... considers that “Snow is black” is a true utterance. If such a modal-contextual frame is omitted as a tautological one, then an illusion of self-evidence occurs; the statement concerning uttering some statement is replaced by a statement concerning some state of affairs: “It is true that the parliament of N... decided to consider the utterance “Snow is black” to be true” transforms into the statement “Snow is black”.

3. Such an important, if not decisive, role of pragmatic factors may create an illusion that political discourse (and the political function of language) is a language usage that does not have referential semantics² but only pragmatics; the utterance is characterized by its force (the addresser's intention, i.e., influence on the addressee) and by its performative felicity. As a result, political language is often considered a tool of propaganda rather than a means of describing reality. If reality (the referential aspect of discourse) exists, then reality exists only in a distorted way, and language becomes a means of distorting rather than describing reality.

Orwell brought this approach to its logical end; thus, it makes sense to discuss its conception, which has not been formalized as a theory but represented as the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell's approach is based on two basic assumptions:

- (1) The constructed reference may have no connection with the reality.
- (2) The constructed reality requires a special language, Newspeak.

If political discourse does not reflect the reality but distorts the reality, and if it is simultaneously impossible to outline the limits of the distortion, then the construction of referential domains ("imaginary reality") may not correspond to the reality at all but may be a result of the process of discourse production. Discourse is based on some image of reality and regenerates this image in its turn. In such a world, physical reality (the matter) disappears; reality is (1) what people think of reality and (2) what the Party considers as true, wherein the former "image of the world" ought to coincide with the latter. Winston Smith's "fault", according to his opponent, is that he still believes in the existence of physical matter. However, the characters of Orwell's novel are not only liars, similar to poets who create texts concerning fictional events, for which Plato suggested expelling the poets from the Ideal State – although some ideas of Orwell's personages are reminiscent of Plato's arguments concerning why liars must be expelled, their aims are opposite. Plato denies any existence of fiction in the State because there must be only one single truth. Yet in Orwell's totalitarian dystopia the fiction, which is constantly changing but unique at any certain period, is taken for truth. Not only is the existence of unchangeable facts denied but so is any mental, and even physical, reality that would not depend on the objectives of the Party and that could be preserved in the memory of people or in documents. In Plato's case, the world appears as a set of fixed and unchangeable propositions,

² Cf.: "The public purpose of political discourse is to inspire in the addressee – citizens of the community – the need for "politically correct" actions and/or assessments. In other words, the purpose of political discourse is not to describe (i.e., not a reference), but to persuade, awakening intentions in the addressee, to provide ground for convincing him and provoking him to operate." (Demyankov 2002: 38, my translation, S.Z.)

irrespective of the variety of its possible linguistic expressions. In the case of Oceania, the world may exist only to the degree that the world is taken as the sphere of reference for the statements whose truth is taken for granted at the given moment. There is nothing in that world that can be treated as logical propositions, which are semantic structures that are independent of language and of contexts.

3.1. The discrepancy between these approaches could be solved if, as suggested by Aristotle,³ the special modalities, or different types of reality are taken into consideration. The constructed reference does not necessarily entail the falsity of the respective utterances. The Party's instructions to rewrite all records to create the new fabricated reality presuppose that a "real" (true, unconstructed) reality should be erased from memory. However, in the novel itself, the existence of the "real" reality is constantly denied. Thus, even the "true description", which is a piece of an old newspaper as if accidentally read by Winston, is a text fabricated for provocative purposes. The treatise *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism* had been written and distributed for the same purpose. Simultaneously, the novel itself is fiction but pretends to be a true description of what actually occurred. Thus, the characteristic feature of political discourse is not falsehood, which is non-correspondence with reality, but distortion of the reality, double reference, and interpretation of the utterance in at least two domains simultaneously. There are two things given within the same verbal expression: not only what happened, but also what is described as having had ostensibly happened. In the novel itself, this characteristic double reference is accounted for as *doublethink*⁴, lying at the basis of the predominant ideology. The mechanism of *doublethink*, as Orwell describes it, is in some respect similar to the semantics of the metaphor: to understand a metaphor, one should simultaneously correlate both the literary meaning and the figurative interpretation of the meta-

³ Cf.: "It is, moreover, evident from what has been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen, – what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen." Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451a (Butcher, Samuel Henry, trans.; available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.mb.txt>).

⁴ "*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. To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies – all this is indispensably necessary. 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; and so on indefinitely, with the lie always one leap ahead of the truth." (Orwell 1971[1949]: 171)

phorical utterance. For example, the utterance “the sun is smiling” obtains a metaphorical meaning only in case the two domains of reference are correlated with each other. The first domain neglects the real world and is where the sun is an animate creature that can smile, and the second domain is the real world, where this utterance is synonymous with the utterance “the sun is shining” (van Dijk 1975: 179). If there is no such double correspondence, the metaphor either lacks sense or loses its metaphorical essence and becomes a so-called “dead metaphor” (Searle 1979: 255).

3.2. The conception of *doublethink* and double reference updates and completes the idea that was previously expressed by Orwell, with some polemic exaggeration, that political language is a tool for disseminating falsehood and misinformation (Orwell 1972[1946]). The matter is not that politicians are liars and therefore use a special language, but in the double reference of the utterance, when at least one of the domains of reference (the picture of the world represented by the utterance) is a constructed reality. Yet the constructed reference does not mean at all that the reference does not exist or else is fabricated, as is suggested by Orwell. Are “our” linguistic means capable of describing the constructed domains of reference (“political reality”) or is a new language (*Newspeak*) required for this purpose, as is suggested in the novel?

In this case, Orwell’s approach paradoxically resembles the theories of logical analysis of language and of logical positivism; the common ground between these theories is the idea of the insufficiency of natural language and the necessity for a new language (logical *newspeak*) for its adequate description. In both cases, the same question arises: is it possible to picture a world in an adequate way by the means of natural language (“*Oldspeak*”) if we simultaneously accept that a true “state of affairs” exists, at least as a theoretical construct or as a concept in the consciousness of an omniscient God (in Orwell’s novel, the omniscience is transposed to the Party). The issue of the insufficiency of linguistic means has been examined not only in linguistics and philosophy, but also in poetry, as well as in mathematics and in natural sciences. However, if in logic and natural sciences this matter was the creation of a new language, then in poetry and in other spheres of the functioning of natural language its extension does not concern the inventory of linguistic units, which, except in some experimental cases, remain the same. In such cases, language extension is due to the introduction of new rules of formation and interpretation, which are built on top of one another and which lead to a radical transformation of the original system.

Concerning political discourse, the problem may be expressed in the following way: whether there is a requirement for a special language, i.e., *Newspeak*, to construct the fabricated reality, as was suggested by the characters of the novel and, most likely, by the author himself. This problem may be the case when the text itself denies the theory by which it was generated. Noticeably, in both the article “Politics

and the English language” and the Appendix to the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Newspeak appears to be a set of certain stylistic means that in several cases sometimes even exaggerates the peculiarities of common English, rather than a new language. Moreover, the novel itself is written in Oldspeak, and the characters of the novel communicate in Oldspeak⁵. In addition, Oldspeak allows the expression of inadmissible thoughts, whereas in Newspeak it is impossible to express these thoughts, and even if these thoughts are expressed, they sound pointless⁶. However, even if such a situation is possible, no totalitarian regime managed to create a new language. Totalitarian practices do not typically create new languages; these practices prohibit non-authorized meanings, which sometimes lead to the prohibition of some non-designated languages (or languages of rebellious minorities) as a means of expression of any thought at all.

4. The text of the novel itself denies Orwell’s idea concerning the necessity of a special language for the distortion of reality; the text demonstrates that, by the same linguistic means, it is possible to describe both the real and the distorted states of affairs. *The novel itself, as well as any other fiction, proves the possibility of describing, in principle, both what has happened and what has not happened.* Even if the difference between those descriptions is expressible (the latter is quite disputable), at least this difference does not depend on the language. In our real world, Orwell constructed a fictional world that we are to perceive as really existing and where the fictional characters construct a third world, which we are to perceive as a fictitious one fabricated by the Party. *None of these worlds present an interest in isolation; the system of these worlds constitutes the domain of reference that is assigned to the novel.* Some fictional reality (“our world in 1984”), which was fabricated by Orwell, pretends to be a description of what actually happened (or would happen) in 1984. This fictional reality includes fiction of the second order, i.e., all verbal and mental images imposed by the Party as the reality and as actual history. However, there is also room for “our”

⁵ Cf.: “Totalitarianism generally dispenses with those powerful means of transformation that the creation of a new language requires. However, G. Orwell’s novel itself doesn’t contradict this thesis: V. Chalikova noticed that even though the characters are permanently talking about Newspeak, it isn’t represented in the novel but for a few words – the executioner and his victims expresses themselves in an immaculately crystalline Orwellian English.” (Kuznetsov 1994: 187; my translation, S.Z.)

⁶ “This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever.” (Orwell 1971[1949]: 241) “There would be many crimes and errors which it would be beyond his power to commit, simply because they were nameless and therefore unimaginable. And it was to be foreseen that with the passage of time the distinguishing characteristics of Newspeak would become more and more pronounced – its words growing fewer and fewer, their meanings more and more rigid, and the chance of putting them to improper uses always diminishing.” (Orwell 1971[1949]: 250)

actual world: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* exists in our real world as a written text and as a work of art (a novel, a movie, a film script, etc.). Regardless, this novel has been functioning in our world as a sample of fiction and not as a documental description of what happened (or might have happened) in 1984. For simplification, leaving all the intermediate worlds (such as worlds of the critics analysing the novel, the fragments of British history depicted in the novel, the non-coinciding mental worlds of the characters, etc.), we may conclude that the semantics of the novel is formed not only by one of the worlds but through correlations between the aforementioned three worlds: (1) Our actual world where we now we live, where Orwell once lived, where he has written his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and where we have been reading this novel. (2) The world of the novel created by Orwell, which is the actual world for the fictional characters who live in that world. (3) The fictional world created and enforced by the omnipotent Party, which ought to be considered as a “true reality” by the characters of the novel. The comprehension of the novel is based on mapping worlds onto each other with one of the worlds interpreted by the means of another world. For example, we “transfer” into our world the Oceanian Minitrue and Minilove, or vice versa. In the world of the novel, we can trace Trotsky, who has become its Goldstein, or attach the moustache of Stalin to Big Brother’s face, etc.

Thus, the semantics of the novel is based on multiple references to the given stratified domains of interpretation and the transworld correspondences between textual signifiers. Modal semantics does not merely set up the correspondence/lack of correspondence between an utterance and reality; modal semantics also operates as a system of alternative worlds, where one and the same state of affairs may receive various modal values (e.g., in one of the worlds, something may be viewed as true, whereas in another world it may be considered possible or due to exist, not due to exist, etc). Different events may be simultaneously occurring; however, in modally differentiated worlds (e.g., in one of the worlds, Emmanuel Goldstein is one of the main actors of the Revolution and the founders of the Party, whereas in the other worlds he is a permanent enemy of the Party, and in yet other worlds he never existed but was fabricated by the Oceanian rulers – similarly to his prototype Leo Trotsky, who, in accordance with some historical records, actively participated in the civil war, but is not mentioned in other records; see below). As semantic interpretation, a bizarre combination of different “truths” may emerge, which are discovered through some discourse and which pretend to be considered a description for “what really was” in contrast to other, “false” discourses – although some of the discourses may be designated as “real” (however, in actuality, all of the discourses are “normative” – see Footnote 1). Thus, one can speak of interaction between various modal semantics rather than primitive falsification [However, even primitive distortion may be considered a degenerative case of interactions between different modalities, where some worlds (set of events and objects) are empty].

Orwell was aware of this falsification, despite all his accusations against politicians and politicized historians. In “Notes on nationalism” (1945) he somehow digressed from the main theme, differentiating between various types of correspondence/lack of correspondence between reality (history) and its description:

The primary aim of propaganda is, of course, to influence contemporary opinion, but those who rewrite history do probably believe with part of their minds that they are actually thrusting facts into the past. When one considers the elaborate forgeries that have been committed in order to show that Trotsky did not play a valuable part in the Russian civil war, it is difficult to feel that the people responsible are merely lying. More probably they feel that their own version *was* what happened in the sight of God, and that one is justified in rearranging the records accordingly.⁷

Orwell’s idea can be rearticulated in terms of the semantics of possible worlds because modal contexts, such as beliefs and convictions, up to the point of view of an omniscient observer (God) are considered. Hence, the semantics of an utterance is not restricted to only two values (true/false). The evaluation depends less on the compliance of the description with reality, but rather on the point of view of the creator of the description, who believes in absolute truth or the correctness of the description. A similar situation is typical not only of political (propagandistic) discourses, but quite often there is also a contrast between two versions of reality: “what really happened” and “what is written in the textbooks” (or in other normative texts) of the humanities (particularly historical ones), i.e., when different descriptions of reality are opposed to each other, either pretends to be recognized as “the only true one”. Discourses with similar structures carry an important heuristic role in science when a new theory should replace an old theory, and the degree of falsification of both old and new theories (the possibility of their refutation via correlating the theories with new facts) is an indicator of their scientific status, in compliance with Popper’s criterion of falsification. However, the case is completely different for political discourses and politicized history. As there is no way to distinguish facts from their description,⁸ a new description creates its own factual base. The previous theory is considered inadequate, if not deceitful. Facts become less decisive than evaluations concerning these facts. In contrast to the usual historical texts, those texts

⁷ Orwell’s “Notes on nationalism” (1945) was accessed at http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat.

⁸ Cf.: “In natural science it is easy to differentiate a qualitative transition from simple observations of facts to theory. Conversely, in history words just reflect other words. That’s why the difference between facts and theories about them is relative, and it is usually ignored. So much the worse for history.” (Steiner 2004: 158, my translation S.Z.)

cannot be adequately perceived separately, i.e., without relating to those discourses that these texts are supposed to deny. For example, the narrative that Trotsky played no prominent role in the Russian Civil War is meaningful only if the narrative has an opposite narrative as its obligatory intertextual counterpart. The semantics of the abovementioned type of texts depends on the interaction of at least two descriptions and is reminiscent of the mechanisms of counterfactuals or literary semantics with its interplay between interpenetrating worlds and a permanent inversion between “actual” and “fictional”. However, notably, the set of worlds itself (their paradigm or, in terms of modal logic, model structure) is given and does not change. Hence, in the world where Trotsky is a civil war hero, there are also possibilities for him to act as a traitor, a passive observer, etc., and all of those possibilities are given as a set of possible worlds that are accessible from the initial world.

Not only worlds (i.e. descriptions of states of affairs) are subject to permanent changes, but also their semantic and modal evaluations, i.e., which of the worlds is to be considered as the actual world, which world actually existed and which non-existing world was to exist (referring to the ideas of Orwellian re-writers of history). In addition, someone rewriting history thereby corrects the mistake of the previous narrator by substituting a modal context with another, i.e., the actual but undue ineligible world is replaced by some other world: a non-existent world that ought to exist, although in the past. It is appropriate to recall Plantinga’s “book” version of possible world semantics: “Each world has its book. Similarly, each maximal possible set of propositions is the book on some world” (Plantinga 1972: 46–47). Simultaneously, in transition from one world to the other, the set of books (library) does not change; this reasoning answers the question “Which of the books contains only true propositions?” which may be varied.

5. Thus, the domain of interpretation of political discourse and the scope of reference of its linguistic expressions is a system of possible world and transworld relations. As the suggested approach is based on the idea of inter-world accessibility, it would be reasonable to refer to its classic source: “A normal model structure is an ordered triple (G, K, R) , where K is a non-empty set, $K \supseteq G$, and R is a reflexive relation defined on K ”. If the notion of a “possible world” is introduced, this element K from G can be singled out as the “real” world (Kripke 1963: 68–69). In other, less technical words, model structure is an ordered triple $\{\{W_0; \{W\}; R\}$ of compatible (accessible) worlds and some relations of accessibility between them: $\{W\}$ is a certain set of possible worlds, W_0 – a certain “privileged” world (for example, the actual world), R – given modal (inter)relations upon $\{W\}$. It actually means that a certain “privileged” world, alongside with a set of further compatible worlds, is selected out of a certain universe of worlds. The semantics of linguistic expressions is derived

through procedures of correlating propositions and possible worlds within some model structure.

The novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself can be considered as a peculiar model structure, where different modal domains (worlds, or models) are interconnected and complicate each other. It pretends to describe both true history (what happened) and, as a part of the latter, those discourses that are imposed on the inhabitants of the fictitious world of the novel as a true history. The polemics between the characters of the novel concern the reality and changeability of history as if anticipating the post-modernist theory of historical discourse, i.e., concerning the semiotically constructible character of historiography and the mood of the existence of the historical past. Meanwhile, the fictitiousness of the reference and its constructability are different because of their nature. In all cases when reality is substituted by its mental or verbal image, the domain of reference is to be constructed, and the instruments and safeguards for ensuring the correspondence between reality and its description are exclusively limited by natural language or by any other sign system. Such dependences on semiotic means and on the constructed character of reference are not symptoms of “inefficiency” or of falsity of description. It is quite another matter that the semantic characteristics of the discourse are substituted for pragmatic ones, and the decisive parameter is not the correspondence between reality and its description, but the effectiveness of the discourse, i.e., to what extent the discourse facilitates the objectives set by the sender of the message. These objectives can be achieved by such extralinguistic means described in Orwell’s novel as extermination of other images (discourses) concerning the past and the present, and even concerning the persons who might be associated with such images by making these persons “unpersons” (a semiotic purge should be accomplished by psychological and physical violence).

However, even in the cases of total violence and of falsification of all documentary evidence, modal diversity does not disappear. In the novel, the deontic modality (the current state of affairs as described by the officials of Oceania) pretends to be the only designated and allowed political modality. However, this discourse implies the existence of some other discourses, i.e., some “undue” state of affairs that is becoming “true” through efforts of the Party leadership. The Party itself has to produce some discourses concerning “undue” worlds – “Oceania prior to the revolution”, which is described in textbooks and in official documents, or in Goldstein’s treatise *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism* as the “true description” concerning the actual state of affairs in Oceania, as well as numerous “plots” which are invented and organized by the secret service (“Minitrue”). Moreover, there is a requirement to have a description of the “actual world”, an explanation why all of the inhabitants of Oceania are under permanent surveillance. Therefore, a modal system

of at least three worlds should be considered: “*Oceania as it is*”; “*Oceania as it was*”; “*Oceania as it is described*”.

In spite of the function ascribed to “Newspeak” in the novel, in cases when Orwell describes the construction of a non-existent reality (for example, school books or instructions on the rewriting of history or the process of creation of the non-existent hero comrade Ogilvy), contextual circumstances appear to be more important than the structures of the language. The change refers not so much to the structure of the language as to the modality of the text. This change demonstrates that *the difference between political and “ordinary” languages lies not in the language means but in the changes of the rules of interpretation and reference*. For that reason, there is no requirement to invent any “Newspeak” at all; the natural language – “Oldspeak” – itself contains a range of “Newspeaks” as its possible variants. The trick made by addressers of political discourse, and left unnoticed by Orwell, particularly consists of using “the ordinary language” with the expectation that the addressee of the text would not notice that, under the cover of “allegedly ordinary language”, text semantics presupposes other rules and operations for the interpretation of the given discourse.⁹ As a rule, the “lexicographic interpretation” is not sufficient to notice and to describe this linguistic trick (as is performed in the abovementioned footnote). In this case, we require more sophisticated mechanisms of modal semantics (semantics of possible worlds). For example, in Orwell’s novel, the proper name ‘London’ signifies various objects in several non-coinciding worlds – “our” world, the author’s world, the world of the characters and readers of the novel, i.e., the “actual” London, the London that existed in the past and is unsuccessfully reconstructed in the memory of the hero of the novel, the London that is described in the novel, etc. The set of

⁹ As a working example, let us adduce Chomsky’s (2001) explication of a similar “double” interpretation (“literal” and “propagandistic”) of the expression “*rogue state*” – one of the key interpretations for today’s system of international relations:

“QUESTION: How would you define a ‘rogue state’? CHOMSKY: “A ‘rogue state’ is a state that defies international laws and conventions, does not consider itself bound by the major treaties and conventions, World Court decisions – in fact, anything except the interests of its own leadership, the forces around the leadership that dominate policy. Well, first of all, remember that I’m using the term in a neutral sense, in terms of its meaning. Almost every term in political discourse has a literal meaning and a propaganda version. And I’m using it in the literal meaning. The propaganda version – which is typically the one that prevails – that’s the version presented by those who have the power to control discourse, propaganda, framework of discussion, and so on. And, in that case, that means primarily the United States. As the United States uses the term ‘rogue state’, it refers to anyone who’s out of control. So, Cuba’s a ‘rogue state’ because it does not submit to U.S. domination. That’s a different usage entirely. As I use the term ‘rogue state’, the leading ‘rogue state’ in the world is the United States. That’s the neutral term”. (“Rogue states draw the usual line. Noam Chomsky interviewed by Christopher Gunness”. *Agenda*, May 2001, accessed at <http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/200105-.html>)

all of these objects will be the semantics of this word in the novel: the interrelation between the real and fictitious cities. There is no reason to deny the connection between the “real” London and the “chief city of Airstrip One”, the province of Oceania that “had once been called England or Britain”, described in the novel. However, in contrast it would not be right to equate these cities. The utterance “*London is the capital of Great Britain*” is false, yet the utterance “*London is the capital of Airstrip One of Oceania*” is true in the world of the novel. The reasoning is the opposite in our actual world. However, the expression “*London is the capital of the Airstrip One of Oceania*” is not meaningless in our world; even out of the referential scope of the novel, the expression has a specific intertextual semantics and refers to the world of the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, making it explicit what contemporary London would be like if the course of history had taken a different turn.

Simultaneously, the constructible character of reference causes a change in a range of semiotic characteristics of the language, not in the linguistic forms of expression (signifiers), but rather in the signified senses and meanings. As a result, new secondary modelling systems (connotative) have emerged, and on the supra-language level the rules of interpretation of language utterances have changed in a substantial way. The signifiers remain the same, creating the illusion that the sign refers to the same object, while implicitly connecting two diverse objects from two different worlds.¹⁰ In a way, this relation can be considered metaphorically (in Lakoff’s sense) – one world is unnoticeably interpreted using the other world.

6. In summary, multiple semantics (multi-world reference) is the essential characteristic of political discourse. Language has become exclusively modal and intentional: any utterance expresses the relations of obligation, possibility, etc. and may be interpreted in intensional and, hence, referentially non-opaque contexts where the proposition should be interpreted indirectly, exclusively regarding some state of affairs with respect to the contextual propositional attitude of beliefs, opinion, custom, norm, etc. However, the semantics does not lose its referential force; in contrast, this force is multiplied, becoming a transworld relation. In this respect, the semantics of political discourse is akin to poetic semantics; however, the multidimensionality of the signified referents is obscured, with referential discourse as a precondition for political effectiveness. Political discourse as a description of “world as it is” presupposes a hidden reference to other modal contexts: “the world in the future” (or “in

¹⁰ Cf.: “Two different symbols can therefore have the sign (the written sign or the sound sign) in common – they then signify in different ways. It can never indicate the common characteristic of two objects that we symbolize them with the same signs but by different *methods of symbolizing*. For the sign is arbitrary. We could therefore equally well choose two different signs and where then would be what was common in the symbolization.” (TLP 3.321–322)

the past”); “how the world should be” (or “should not be”), etc. Thus, the domain of the interpretation of political discourse is a set of possible worlds (Kripke’s model structure mentioned above).

For us, such a system itself is neutral with respect to political and ideological purposes; the system can be grounds for either totalitarian or democratic discourses, and we do not intend to associate it either with language practices of totalitarian regimes (as was done in Young 1991; Granskaya et.al. 2012) or with so-called “American-style propaganda” as was suggested in Chomsky 1988: 79. For Orwell, political language “is designed to make lies sound truthful”, and “this is true of all political parties” without any exception (Orwell 1946). A formal structure of discourse is exclusively a means of expression of any ideological content and is comparable with language.¹¹ Assessment is not subject to the system itself *per se* but rather how and for what purposes the assessment is used. Of course, it is possible to introduce some typology based on different modifications of Kripke’s model structures, and the most relevant parameter may be the degree of deviation between the worlds within it (for instance, to what degree political reality is independent of factual description, i.e., to what extent it is permissible to lie). However, the typology would require the construction of a new meta-model, similar to the one that Orwell has represented in his novel, with the aim to correlate and evaluate some discourse that pretends to be considered as true with some other discourse, which is based on certain ideological priorities¹² that pretend to be recognized as even more truthful. This process is reminiscent of the process of complication of political discourse as described above. As can be seen, not only the construction of political discourse but

¹¹ Cf.: “... a language may equally serve both the old, moribund system and the new, rising system; both the old base and the new base; both the exploiters and the exploited. It is no secret to anyone that the Russian language served Russian capitalism and Russian bourgeois culture before the October Revolution just as well as it now serves the socialist system and socialist culture of Russian society. The same must be said of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Georgian, Armenian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Moldavian, Tatar, Azerbaijanian, Bashkirian, Turkmenian and other languages of the Soviet nations; they served the old, bourgeois system of these nations just as well as they serve the new, socialist system.” Josif Stalin, “Marxism and problems of linguistics” (1950); accessed at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1950/jun/20.htm>

¹² Cf “... we study history because we are interested in it, and perhaps because we wish to learn something about our own problems. But history can serve neither of these two purposes if, under the influence of an idea of objectivity, we hesitate to present historical problems from our point of view.” (Popper 1966: 462–463)

As one can see, the rulers of Oceania and the champion of open society agree that history is dependent on political will and that the only matter is which political objectives one or the other “historical interpretation” stands for.

also its evaluation is transposed from semantics to the battlefield of politics: which projects and discourses are worthy enough to be praised as good and which are doomed to be considered evil.

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Язык и политическая реальность: переосмысливая Джорджа Оруэлла

Область референции политического дискурса зависит от языка, она есть конструктор, генерируемый самим дискурсом. Такое понимание соотношения между языком и политической реальностью выражено в романе Джорджа Оруэлла «1984». Понятия современной семантики и прагматики позволяют эксплицировать, каким образом язык действует и как форма конструирования реальности, и как особый тип социального вербального поведения. Язык становится исключительно модальным и интенциональным, любое высказывание выражает отношения долженствования, возможности, и т.п. и может быть интерпретировано в интенциональном и, следовательно, референциально не-прозрачном контексте. Однако семантика не утрачивает референциальную силу; напротив, это сила преумножается, становясь межмировым отношением. В этом смысле семантика поэтического дискурса сродни поэтической. Тем не менее семантическая многомерность означаемых референтов остается неявной, поскольку референтность дискурса есть предусловие его эффективности. Политический дискурс, будучи описанием «мира, таким как он есть», предполагает скрытую референцию к другим модальным контекстам: «мир в будущем» (или «в прошлом»); «каким мир должен (или – не должен) быть» и т.п. Область интерпретации политического дискурса есть множество возможных миров.

Keel ja poliitiline reaalsus: uus vaade George Orwellile

Poliitilise diskursuse referentsvaldkond ei ole keelest sõltumatu; see valdkond on konstrueeritud ning seda ajendab diskursus ise. Sellist lähenemist keele ja poliitilise reaalsuse vahelisele suhtele väljendab George Orwelli romaan “1984”. Tänapäevane arusaam semantikast ja pragmaatikast võimaldab sellele teatud uut vaatenurka. Sel juhul toimib keel nii tegelikkuse konstrueerimise vormina kui ka teatud liiki sotsiaalse verbaalse käitumisena. Keel on muutunud

ainüksi modaalseks ja intentsionaalseks; iga lausung väljendab kohustuse, võimaluse, jne suhteid ning neid võib tõlgendada intensionaalses ja seega referentsiaalselt läbipaistmatus kontekstis. Siiski ei kaota semantika oma referentsiaalset jõudu. Vastupidi, see jõud mitmekordistub, muutudes maailmaüleseks suhestumiseks. Nii on poliitilise diskursuse semantika suguluses poeetilise semantikaga; siiski on tähistatavate referentide mitmemõõtmelisus ähmane, jäädes varjatuks, sest referentsiaalne diskursus on tõhususe eeltingimus. Poliitiline diskursus maailma kirjeldusena “sellisena, nagu see on”, eeldab peidetud referentsi/osutust teistele modaalsele kontekstidele: “maailm tulevikus” (või “minevikus”); “kuidas maailm peaks olema” (või “ei peaks olema”), jne. Poliitilise diskursuse valdkond on võimalike maailmade kogum, mida modaalses semantikas kirjeldatakse Kripke mudeli struktuuri kaudu.