

SEMIOTICS AND THE NEWSPEAK

1. The term of Newspeak was introduced by George Orwell in his novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four". So, the term is of no theoretical meaning out it is simply a result of literary fancy. Nevertheless, it is a term of great importance because it displays a very specific phenomenon of human communication, otherwise un-named. The newspeak appears in the totalitarian countries and it consists of the peculiar usage of language. First of all, the newspeak is a characteristic language of propaganda and ideology; however, it spreads much wider and penetrates also into the very broad scope of human communication. Moreover, it influences people's entire way of thinking. It contributes to the process of brain-washing and creates the "totalitarian mind". Plainly, then, the problem of newspeak is much more substantial and significant than only the narrow and superficial question of the new usage and the new meanings of particular words.

Orwell reveals the appearance of newspeak, but his method is rather an intuition than a solid analysis. His novel is full of very adequate observations, yet it does not present an extensive cognition of the phenomenon. After all, it was not his aim. Orwell is not the unique author who writes about the political sense of the language usage. Besides him, some other authors touch on this topic. Especially worth while mentioning at this point is Klemperer's book "LTI" which presents an interesting study of the Nazi manner of using German. Thus, the fact of existence of the newspeak is well known; there cannot be a doubt that there is such a phenomenon. Nevertheless, the cognition of it is in the most part only on the level of the description of some individual samples. There is neither an essential knowledge of the phenomenon, nor have we abstract terms for its analysis. Yet the newspeak is a very real phenomenon of human communication and the cognitive tools for its description are needed.

2. My principal aim in this paper is to consider the efficacy of some semiotic terms for explaining the way of acting of the newspeak. It seems obvious that semiotics as a general theory of signs could be of great importance for the understanding of the peculiarity of human communication created by the newspeak. The newspeak is a degenerate form of communication. My remarks on this topic have only a very tentative character because,

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on the one hand, semiotics is a knowledge being only *in statu nascendi* and, on the other hand, there is no comprehensive description of the newspeak either.

In my attempt to analyse some aspects of the newspeak I shall use the terminology of Max Bense's *Basistheorie*. His *Basistheorie*, grounded on Peirce's idea of triadic semiosis, provides the essential tools needed for the semiotic analysis. And the concept of newspeak I shall use as created by Orwell. Newspeak is a language of a new society and its main function is no longer to communicate the ideas but to establish the limits of thought. "The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought. In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. (...) Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. Even now, of course, there's no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It's merely a question of self-discipline, reality control. But in the end, there won't be any need even for that. The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect." And Orwell continues: "Has it ever occurred to you that by the year 2050, at the very least, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now? (...) By 2050 all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron - they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be. (...) In fact, the whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking - not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness."

Thus, the newspeak is a new dimension of thought or it is rather the complete lack of thought. The newspeak is a system of signs, but it is a very specific system of signs which is no longer identical with thought. It is rather contradictory to all attempts to think. So, the newspeak intervenes in the very nature of a sign, it changes its genuine essence. However, it still is a system of signs, it is a language of human communication, and the best means for its analysis seem to be the semiotic terms.

3. A sign is a triadic relation of the vehicle of meaning, or of the sign in the narrow sense, its object and its interpretant. A sign is by its genuine essence a triad. According to such a triadic structure of the sign there are three possible dimensions of semiotic analysis. Max Bense calls these levels of semiosis the *Mittelbezug*, the *Objektbezug* and the *Interpretantenbezug* of a sign.

All can serve as a vehicle of the meaning but every vehicle creates only the possibility of a sign. An object is something the sign is referring to. In the semiotics of Peirce and Bense there is a differentiation of two kinds of objects. An immediate object is the object as a sign presents it. The analogy can be made with the Husserlian idea of an intentional object which is an object as it is given in the intentional act of consciousness. In semiotics, the immediate object is an object as it is represented by a sign. So, its way of being is only a way of being of the second correlate of a triad. However, the dynamic object is that which is self-subsistent to a triad; it is a real thing or event, a relation or a content. Moreover, there are three kinds of interpretants. The interpretant is a meaning of a given sign as well as it is another sign into which the previous one can be translated. Peirce reveals this double sense of interpretant in his distinction of the immediate and final, or normal, interpretants. The immediate interpretant is an intrinsic interpretability of a sign, it is the pure possibility of interpretation which belongs to the sign itself. The normal interpretant defines the position of a sign in the semiotic system - it is a translation of a sign into another sign. Furthermore, the dynamic interpretant is a factual, empirical understanding of a sign by some mind.

The first level of semiotic analysis forms the dimension of *Mittelbezug*. So, what is specific of the newspeak from the point of view of sign repertoire? Orwell writes: "Newspeak was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by the cutting of the choice of words down to a minimum" and he adds: "reduction of vocabulary was regarded as an end in itself".

Orwell is right in his intuition; the basic function of the newspeak is to limit the repertoire of signs. The destruction of certain words is a deprivation of the possibility of thinking in some fields; it makes some ideas unthinkable. And the narrow vocabulary contributes to the limitation of human communication. "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann,

darüber muss man schweigen." This last sentence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* explains clearly why the reduction of repertoire of signs is of great importance for the newspeak. (Incidentally, once my article interpreting semiotics was confiscated by the censorship in Poland because I used as its title the above-mentioned quotation of Wittgenstein and the suspicion arose that the article was dealing with the criticism of the censorship office.)

Yet the newspeak does not only restrain the repertoire of signs, it also creates some new signs, previously unknown in the Oldspeak. Therefore, the process of human communication is influenced by the double compulsion : several signs are destroyed and some others introduced. The rule of change is determined by some extra-linguistic phenomena. Nevertheless, the general tendency is to diminish the repertoire of signs.

4. The second dimension of semiotic analysis is concerned with the question of the *Objektbezug* of a sign. The main problem here is the nature of object and its way of being. According to semiotics, as mentioned before, a sign has two objects : the immediate and the dynamic. However, the newspeak functions as though there were only one object of a sign, i.e., the dynamic one. The substantial feature of the newspeak is that it leaves no room either for the intentional object or for the represented object. The represented object is transformed into the real one. Plainly, then, the reality of an object is taken for granted. What is named is understood as existent, and the creation of words functions as the creation of reality, as well as the destroying of words acts as the destroying of things. That is why the above-mentioned handling of the repertoire of signs is of basic significance. The newspeak pretends to interpret the presented world image as represented reality, that is, the immediate object as the dynamic one. And according to it, in the process of human communication, that which is spoken in the speech act should be understood as existent and real only on the ground that it is uttered. So, in the terms of semiotics, the newspeak causes a reduction of the *Objektbezug* dimension to the naive and simplistic realism; the duality of the object of a sign becomes limited to the dynamic object.

This peculiarity on the level of the *Objektbezug*, so typical of the newspeak, reminds me of, Ernst Cassirer's theory of mythical thinking, pointed out in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. According to Cassirer, mythical thought does not know the differentiation between the ideal and the real, between the subjective and the objective, between a word and a thing. In a myth, words have power of real causes. And this same magic power of words can be found in the newspeak. Its aim is to convince that the world is not as it is, but that it is such as is presented in the newspeak. So, the newspeak intends to create, to determine the world. This mythical intention of the newspeak influences the entire process of human communication. Moreover, it degenerates the basic goal of communication. The process of communication no longer serves the broad and fast exchange of information because the newspeak is not a means for any informative aim. Quite on the contrary, its aim is its magic power used for the creation of the brave new world. Consequently, the newspeak limits the profusion of all kinds of data, it intends to narrow human communication to the boundaries which are given *a priori* which are taken for granted. The stream of information is not an intrinsic aim of newspeak communication while this communication is for the sake of the magic usage of words. And the magic usage of words consists in pretending that the only fictive image is a true reality of the world.

According to semiotics, there are three different kinds of *Objektbezug* of a sign. The relation of a sign to its object can be iconic, indexical or symbolic. Our question is : which kind of relation prevails in the newspeak? It seems that the substantial rôle is played there by the indexical signs. But it is not simply an index which is typical of the newspeak, it is rather an index *à rebours*. The index is a sign in which the relation between a sign and its object is of a factual nature; in the most part it is a causal connection. For instance, the position of a weathercock is an indexical sign of the direction of wind, which, being an object, is a cause of the sign, i.e., of the position of the weathercock, which is its effect. However, as mentioned above, in the newspeak we can find just the opposite way of influence, not from an object to its sign but from a sign to its object. It is a sign, a word, and very often a new word, which intends to determine its object, to create the brave new world. So, the indexical relation is turned the other way, a sign and its object are inverted in their position, while the general idea of causal nature of their relation is preserved.

In such a sense, the basic sign of the newspeak is the transposed index or the index *à rebours*. Moreover, the above defined magic function of words presents exactly this same kind of relation between a sign and its object. The main purpose of the newspeak signs consists in the determination of their objects. They pretend to have the power to influence the world. Therefore, in the newspeak even the general symbols function as the indexical signs *à rebours*.

5. The third dimension of semiotic analysis is formed by the *Interpretantenbezug* of a sign. From this point of view the newspeak presents some peculiarities as well. First of all, it influences the interpretability and conventionality of a sign. It is obvious that the meaning of a sign is always of a conventional character; the connection of a sign with its sense cannot be a natural relation. Something is a sign only under the condition that it is interpreted as a meaningful sign. Nevertheless this conventional relationship of meaning in the most part (especially in the natural languages) is grounded on common experience. Its basis is the experience and the tradition of a given language or the historical and cultural experience of a particular community, etc. So, generally speaking, the semiotic conventions are understandable due to their roots in the cultural tradition. Or, in other words, the immediate interpretant, i.e. an intrinsic interpretability of a sign is grounded on common experience; however, it is still only the possibility of interpretation. A very typical phenomenon of the newspeak is the breaking of all rules of common experience which results in introducing new words or in giving new sense to the old ones. This breaking with tradition can be defined as the changing of the culturally rooted interpretability into the uprooted one. So, the context of a sign is fully open. Plainly, then, the handling with signs made by the newspeak masters consists not only, as Orwell says, in the reduction of the vocabulary, it deals also with the sense of signs, with their intrinsic interpretability. This uprooted interpretability of the newspeak signs can be defined in the terms of semiotics as the very abundance of the rhematic signs. It seems that only the rhematic sign, the context of which is open, gives the opportunity to manipulate with its sense and to establish its new, occasionally useful, meanings. And the operation performed by the newspeak in a natural language consists in the most part in the transformation of the many symbolic-argumentic signs into the indexical-rhematic signs. In the terms of Bense's semiotics we could say that in the newspeak signs dominate : 3.1 2.2 1.2 as well as 3.1 2.2 1.3.

Next to the immediate interpretant is the final interpretant of a sign. It is another sign into which the previous one can be translated. The uprooted interpretability means the devastation of the established rules of interpretation. The understanding of meanings and their translation into the newspeak is impossible without special studies of its structure. The newspeak constitutes the new semiotic system with new meanings and new rules of transformation. Some of newspeak senses may be translated back into the system of the Oldspeak; that is in the most part a work of Western correspondents in the totalitarian states. The logic of the newspeak in many points seems to be illogical. It is. But such is its aim: The destruction of thought.

The translation of a sign into another sign produces its logical interpretant. As already mentioned, in the system of newspeak this logical interpretant is rather an illogical one. However, besides the logical interpretant semiotic analysis distinguishes two other types of interpretants : the emotional and the dynamic ones. They are not the forms of translation of a sign into other signs but rather the other than semiotic kinds of effects of a sign. Both of them play a substantial rôle in the newspeak.

It seems that the principal way in which the newspeak can influence its utterers and listeners is the emotional quasi-interpretation of signs. The emotional connotation of signs significantly helps their illogical interpretation. The emotions serve as a cover for the illogicality of meanings. They provide the motives for agreement with the illogical intellectual interpretants. And the newspeak appeals very frequently to the feelings of its audience. Nevertheless, this appeal never constitutes an aim in itself, it is always only a medium for something else, a way of persuasion for some particular intellectual meanings which are very contrary to common experience. Some statements seem to be less logical, stronger emotional support for them is needed. Thus, the outstanding feature of the newspeak is not simply the multitude of the emotional interpretants but the specific function of the emotional quasi-interpretation. This particular function of the emotional interpretant is to bolster-up the illogical schema of newspeak.

The dynamic interpretant seems to be of less importance for the newspeak. The direct influence on the behaviour and action of people, even if intended, is not succeeded by the newspeak. The newspeak is not a language

of simple commands. It contains a certain amount of them, of course. But they do not constitute its genuine essence. The substantial nature of the newspeak is a hidden persuasion. Its aim is to create in an invisible way the new mind. It intends to destroy thought by annihilating the tools for logical thinking. And its main way of acting in this direction is to support the illogicality of intellectual newspeak meanings by the emotional quasi-interpretation.

This aspect of hidden persuasion brings the newspeak close to the language of advertisements. However, the difference lies in the fact that advertisements produce in the most part dynamic interpretants, while the newspeak is based on the emotional ones.

6. A sign conceived as a triadic relation takes for granted the existence of other signs. The single or unique sign is impossible because something can be a sign only under the condition that it is interpreted as a sign by another sign. Thus, every sign demands a system of signs. Moreover, every sign produces other signs, that is, its interpretants. Plainly, then, the triadic sign relation is a generative entity. Its faculty for self-reproduction constitutes the entire universum of signs. This generative essence of a sign is of great importance for human communication.

As Wittgenstein accurately writes : "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen." The actual limits of the sign universe restrain the field of our thinking and of our intersubjective communication. The ineffable can neither be gotten acquainted with nor can it be declared. And all that which is outside the world of signs is unutterable. The limits of signs are the limits of human mind. However, Wittgenstein is wrong in his opinion that there exists the absolute limitation of language or of any system of signs. The line between that which can be expressed and that which is ineffable is relative in its very nature and is permanently changing. The absolute ineffable does not exist. On the contrary, the ineffable is always concrete and temporal, it is unspeakable in the given system of signs and at the given moment. And, on the other hand, the sign universe is changing and growing due to the self-reproductive nature of a sign and the given forms of expression are permanently transcended. Semiosis consists in the unending transcendence of the ineffable. Thus, it is constantly breaking its own limits.

This self-transcending faculty forms the genuine essence of semiosis. And there is no necessity to explain how significant it is for human communication. It makes possible the permanent growing and developing of the community of minds, or in other words, of the *Interpretations-gemeinschaft*. Moreover, it constitutes the new dimensions of human experience. It is the *conditio sine qua non* for all forms of intellectual life.

However, this spontaneous faculty for the growth of semiosis is in the most part destroyed by the newspeak. The newspeak degenerates the entire process of semiosis, it intervenes in its essence and changes its cognitive function. It does not open the new dimensions of experience, it closes the boundaries of expressiveness. This degenerating function of the newspeak results from the reduction of repertoire of signs, from the prevalence of rhematic and indexical signs, as well as from the domination of emotional quasi-interpretation. However, only taken collectively, all these processes can explain this devastating influence on human communication produced by the newspeak. It seems that the basic effect of the newspeak is the spreading of the ineffable. And it is not only because of its narrow vocabulary; as mentioned above, the newspeak not only rejects some signs, it introduces some new ones, too. The main reason is rather the destruction of the intellectual interpretation as well as the naive realistic understanding of the object.

The newspeak loses this appeal for interpretation which is constitutive for every sign. The newspeak sign is no longer a generative entity. It stops the semiosis, which by its essence is an infinite process, because it uses the words as tools for persuasion rather than for information. Persuasion is a final effect of a sign; it neither demands further interpretation, nor is it capable by itself to produce interpretation. It is an extra-semiotic effect which ends the process of interpretation. So, the *Interpretationsgemeinschaft* of the newspeak is a community of restricted intellectual experience and of restricted communication. It is a community in which the sphere of the ineffable is systematically growing and growing. Plainly, then, the newspeak is not only a particular kind of language, but, in addition to it, it is a language which opposes, the genuine essence of semiosis. It spreads the unspeakable instead of transcending the ineffable.

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