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Language power potential

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Abstract:

This paper looks at the power feature immanent to language. Through exploring the concept of language in the understanding of Ferdinand de Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Orwell, it demonstrates how language can be used as a powerful tool for the control of the society. A qualitative analysis of the daily Rudé Právo, which forms a part of this paper, shows how the Czechoslovak regime in 1948-1989 changed the Czech language and adapted it to its needs, making it a totalitarian language. Through the introduction of the communication theory of K. W. Deutsch this paper shows how such an abuse of language threatens the viability of political systems. The final part of the paper identifies similar features of language abuse in liberal democracies by applying the norms of political correctness and cautions that such tendencies are equally dangerous to the viability of political systems as the creation of totalitarian languages.

Key words:

Language, totalitarianism, Deutsch, communication, power

Introduction

Language studies emerged as a notable topic in the social science discourse at the break of the 19th and 20th century. After the works of Gustave Le Bon and Walter Lippmann, which focused on crowd psychology and public opinion from a theoretical point of view, the propagandistic potential of language and its capacity to promote political doctrines and ideologies manifested itself openly through the actions of political practitioners such as Joseph Goebbels or Alfred Harmsworth,² in their service for the Third Reich and the United Kingdom respectively. The study of language was developed in the first half of the 20th century mainly within the Vienna Circle and the works of Bertrand Russell, Ferdinand de

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Saussure, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The Prague Linguistic Circle and Roman Jakobson also played an important role in the new discourse.

The study of the power potential of language and the formation of totalitarian language creates a particular field in the study of language. An exceptional analysis of this phenomenon was provided by George Orwell in his essays and particularly through his language *newspeak* in his novel, *1984*. But other names cannot be omitted in this context, mainly the Polish authors Michal Glowński and Jerzy Bralczyk as well as Victor Klemperer and his analysis of the language of the Third Reich and the Czech authors Petr Fidelius, Vladimír Macura and a team of authors led by Čermák, Cvrček and Schmiedtová, who recently published a dictionary of t communist totalitarian language.³

The following text links the language power potential with political systems and their sustainability. It does so on the basis of the communication theory of Karl Wolfgang Deutsch, which sees communication and the information flow as a key variable in achieving objectives of the steering systems of regimes, including their primary objective, which is survival.

The introductory part of this paper presents some basic approaches to the study of language and key concepts in the discourse and the importance of language for communication. Subsequently the structuralist conception of language of Ferdinand de Saussure and Wittgenstein's understanding of language and the potential power that these concepts offer are pointed out. The theoretical outline of the basic characteristics of totalitarian language is exemplified by the works of George Orwell and the practical application of totalitarian language by a qualitative analysis of the language of the Czechoslovak regime in the years 1948-1989.

The role the application of totalitarian language plays in political systems is subsequently illustrated by applying the issue to Deutsch's cyber-systemic approach. In the concluding part of the paper, attention is drawn to the fact that the potential power of language is present across political systems and regimes and that its abuse is not exclusive for totalitarian systems, but is also present in systems that we nowadays call liberal democracies. The threat to the survival of systems demonstrated on totalitarian regimes thus fully applies to the present democratic world.

Language

Human beings have to communicate. We share our thoughts through language, which enables us to create them. Our knowledge doesn't go through a two-step phase, when we

³ *Slovník komunistické totality*. 2010. Eds. ČERMÁK, F., CVRČEK, V., SCHMIEDTOVÁ, V. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.

would first think and then express our thoughts through language. We think through language, which is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for thinking. Language is inherently a limited expression of our thinking (SANGUINETTI 2007, p. 147-157).

By language we understand a system of “means of expression used for communication. These means are of a sign nature or take part in forming signs (OSVALDOVÁ, HALADA 2007, p. 97).”⁴ A language can be construed as “any sign system, through which something is labelled (ŠPŮR 2002, p. 83).”⁵

The issue of the nature and meanings of symbols, which they carry, is best explained by the sign nature of language in the understanding of the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure. A key concept in Saussure's understanding of language is the sign, which is composed of two components: the signifier and the signified. That is, the mental image of the character and the object. If the sender of the information agrees with the receiver of this information on the meaning of the signified, indicated by the signifier, communication is possible (BURTON, JIRÁK 2003, p. 80-81). This consensus is necessary, as the meaning of the character is not inherent to it through nature, but is arbitrary, given through conventions and through a consensus between the communication actors.

However, the meanings which individual language signs adopt can be changed in a particular way of their organisation or by a change in this organisation of their relations (PEREGRIN 1999, p. 281). Victor Klemperer notes: “However an individual word or phrase or a language turn, can according to the context in which it occurs, have a different or opposing meaning (KLEMPERER 2003, p. 156).”⁶ Language signs therefore do not exist independently of each other or of the language, but are dependent on their position in the structured language system (ČERNÝ, HOLEŠ 2004, p. 115). Language thus simply is not a mere connection of words carrying fixed meanings, but a meaning-making actor (PEREGRIN 1999, p. 280).

This phenomenon caught the interest of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who developed it in his concept of language games. Wittgenstein understood language as a way how not only ideas originate and keep their existence, but also all being and existence. Because according to Wittgenstein a meaningful idea is only an idea which can be meaningfully expressed. And only an expression the content of which can be empirically verified can be considered

⁴ Translated from Czech: „výrazových prostředků sloužících k dorozumívání. Tyto prostředky mají znakovou povahu, nebo se na utváření znaku podílejí.“

⁵ Translated from Czech: „jakýkoli znakový systém, kterým je něco označováno.“

⁶ Translated from Czech: „Jednotlivé slovo ovšem, jednotlivý obrat může mít podle kontextu, v němž se vyskytuje, nanejvýš rozdílný až protichůdný význam.“

meaningful (ŠPŮR 2002, p. 34). Language thus limits the possibility of thinking and being, because according to Wittgenstein anything that can be thought can also be said and “a sign is what can be perceived on the symbol by senses (WITTGENSTEIN 2007, p. 22).”⁷

According to Wittgenstein, language creates the world: The world is a set of facts expressed by language, the limits of language are the limits of the world and the structure of the world corresponds to the structure of language (CRUZ PRADOS 1987, p. 198). Wittgenstein's understanding of language leads him to the conclusion that “by stating the essence of the sentence, the nature of all description is stated, that is the essence of the world (WITTGENSTEIN 2007, p. 55)”⁸ because “our knowledge of logic is not an abstraction from the forms of pure thought, in which objects and worldly relations are thought, but is derived from speech, from how we speak, from how we use our language (ŠPŮR 2002, p. 35).”⁹

Wittgenstein's understanding of language absolutises this. His idea that through exploring a language we can perceive the complete reality and that the logic of the world is a projection of the logic of language, was however rejected by many thinkers, especially Bertrand Russell (RUSSELL 2005, p. 91), who warned against Wittgenstein's absolutisation of language and negligence of the fact that other realities exist beyond the language, albeit they might be inexpressible (ŠPŮR 2002, p. 81).

Totalitarian Language

The Saussureian and Wittgensteinian conception of language sketches out its power potential and the way how it can be used to control and hold power. It shows how to create a totalitarian language, that is a *symbolic code developed for the purpose of total domination of a society*.

One way consists in an inaccurate decoding of transferred information. To determine the name for a *car*, we simply point to it and utter the word *car* (LOCKE 1984, p. 250-251). This type of labelling of material entities is quite simple. But for non-material entities such as *justice*, *democracy*, *power* and other a precise labelling is much more problematic. We can clearly define the meaning of the label *house*. However, how do we manage the same with the word *home*? This is the space which language creates for its abuse. The meaning of concepts which cannot be immediately grasped by the human mind is individual and subjective. Basic agreement is likewise possible if the meaning is accurately defined by consensus, but consensus over such abstract concepts is much more problematic than that of material entities.

⁷ Translated from Czech: „znak je to, co lze na symbolu vnímat smysly.“

⁸ Translated from Czech: „uvedením podstaty věty se udá podstata veškerého popisu, tedy podstata světa.“

⁹ Translated from Czech: „naše vědění logiky není abstrakcí z forem čistého myšlení, ve kterých se myslí věci a souvislosti světa, ale je vyvozeno z řeči, z toho, jak mluvíme, jak svůj jazyk užíváme.“

Totalitarian language uses this aspect of language to change the meaning of abstract concepts. Therefore it retains their form as the signifier, but the essence, signified, is changed.

Another power-creating consequence of the semiotic understanding of language is the fact that what is labelled, is prior to how it is labelled. Totalitarian language takes advantage of this as it first creates something and subsequently labels it, while selecting from one of the three basic emotional linkages we know: positive, neutral and negative (ČERNÝ, HOLEŠ 2004, p. 107). Thus, when a totalitarian regime introduces a new reality it can either create a new sign or change the meaning of an existing sign and with that choose an emotional or evaluative category, which fits its intended purpose. If it wants the new entity to be perceived positively, it changes the substance but not the form of an established and positively perceived sign. The word *democracy* can serve as an example. The German Democratic Republic or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were or are not an inch nearer to becoming democracies but nevertheless the sign gives their name a positive connotation. Certainly more favourable than the much more adequate designations, such as the Tyrannical People's Republic of Korea or similar would create.

Thanks to the semiotic approach we understand that we perceive the reality through symbols and thus it is very simple to change the meaning and understanding of reality through changing the meaning of these symbols.

By analogy, Wittgenstein's theory also proved to be a potentially useful tool of totalitarian regimes. Wittgenstein's understanding of the language, in which language reflects reality and can only affect this reality (since it expresses ideas that cannot think nonsense or anything meaningless), in which the structure of the world is determined by the structure of language, such an understanding, allows by changing the language to change the world by creating a new reality. By mastering language in this way it is possible not only to control the society, but to create a new one.¹⁰

It is obvious that such reality is only illusory and a full realization of this idea is utopian. Wittgenstein is aware of this (WITTGENSTEIN 2007, p. 26). We cannot create a new world in the material understanding simply by creating a new language. But through language we can interpret reality and create the semblance of a different reality, and this is what totalitarian language aspires to in its effort to create a new existence. Fidelius states that "there is a certain order in the communist speech, it is really a *speech* of some *world*, though

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt considers the creation of a new man and of a new world to be a typical effort of totalitarian regimes.

the world would be an 'imaginary' ideological *image* of the world (FIDELIUS 1998, p. 11).”¹¹

However, when one of the communication parties is denied the opportunity to recognize the true reality, language ceases to perform its communication function and acquires a power function. This thesis is defended by Joseph Pieper, who argues that not any speech can be considered communication. Only truthful speech is communication and a lie is its opposite, the negation of communication (PIEPER 1992, p. 16). And when the relationship between the communication parties is not communicative but pursues other objectives, namely to gain something from the other parties of communication, this relationship becomes a relationship of power. So when the public discourse ceases to reflect the truth, it becomes a tool of a tyrant, who commits himself to what Plato attributed to the Sophists in the dialogue *Gorgiás*. Namely, that they abused words to create and communicate a reality, which didn't exist (PIEPER 1992, p. 34-35).

Orwellian understanding of power elements in language

George Orwell was arguably the one who most clearly pointed out the possibility of the misuse of language. His criticism focused on how the English language was used, mainly its abstractness when dealing with certain issues, escaping from being specific and concrete, using generalizing words, predefined phrases, metaphors, idioms and comparisons, which according to Orwell by invoking established images on the recipients side and simplifying the intellectual effort of writers create a vague and broadly interpretable text. He also criticised simplifying the language by using descriptive phrases instead of simple verbs, unnecessary creation of new terms with the aim to make speech acts sound more expertly and inappropriate use of adjectives and adverbs, resulting in unusual structures (*small disaster*, *velvet revolution* or *big nothing*) (ORWELL 1966, p. 357 - 361).

Orwell managed to transform his theoretical understanding of totalitarian language into the creation of the language *newspeak* in 1984. A key element of this created communication code is reduction. *Newspeak* destroys the plurality of words. The objective of such action is obvious. The tight link between thought and language, as we have demonstrated before, and which Orwell was well aware of, means that by reducing language, thinking is reduced as well. “The artificial language ‘newspeak’ abundant with abbreviations, stripped of all ‘useless’ labels like *justice*, *morality*, *compassion*, *religion* and freed of all ‘unnecessary’ connotations of the remaining, indispensable words, gradually emancipates one from all

¹¹ Translated from Czech: „v komunistické řeči vládne jakýsi řád, že je to opravdu *řeč* o nějakém *světě*, byť to byl svět „imaginární“, tedy určitý ideologický *obraz* světa.“

thought processes and solely serves ideological tractates. However these are merely mechanical compilations of words; thinking is undesirable (ŠLOSAR In JANČÁKOVÁ, KOMÁREK, ULIČNÝ 1993, p. 110).¹² This linguistic reduction is achieved through a range of tools. One is the use of precisely outlined dichotomies, which do not leave space for alternatives (good and evil, joy and sadness). Another manifestation or tool of this language reduction is the merging of verbs and nouns. Likewise words with a negative stain are removed from *newspeak*. *Bad* is thus substituted by the negation of its antonym *notgood*. Thus a further reduction of vocabulary is achieved. Similarly gradation was eliminated in *newspeak*, so *better* became *gooder* and *best* became *goodest*. An alternative form of gradation allowed for the possibility of adding prefixes, so the adjectives acquired the form of *good*, *plusgood* and *doubleplusgood*.

Furthermore, *newspeak* removed irregularities in the formation of the plural. *Man* thus instead of *men* takes the form of *mans*. It also simplified verb conjugation. Thus the past tense is consistently created by adding the suffix *-ed*. All irregularities have been removed. The last major element of the reduction of vocabulary was the elimination of all synonyms. It was always the single and moreover the shortest word that was left, whereas all the other variants of this word were discarded.

All the reductions of words have a single aim: to remove the maximum set of words for the sake of regularity and simplicity of the language. This consequently leads to limited options in thinking. The fewer words the less room for thought there is. And the smaller the possibility one has to think the easier he is controlled, the easier the society turned into a homogeneous, unthinking and apathetic mass. The reduction of vocabulary also prevented any linguistic form of disagreement with the steering of the system and subsequently also a thought disagreement, as we think through language. All words that would allow expression of unwanted thoughts were destroyed in *newspeak*. The possibility to think was consequently destroyed as well.

Another typical aspect of totalitarian language is the creation of distinctive slogans instigating actions which need not be thought about. The unity of thinking, which it seeks to create, makes the totalitarian language simple, austere and offers clear, immediate, direct solutions and apodictic answers to all questions (KLEMPERER 2003, p. 27). It clearly defines the categories of good and evil, friend and enemy. A black-and-white vision of reality

¹² Translated from Czech: „Umělý jazyk „newspeak“ oplývající zkratkami, zbavený všech „neužitečných“ pojmenování jako *spravedlnost*, *morálka*, *soucit*, *náboženství* a zbavený všech „nepotřebných“ konotací zbylých, nepostradatelných slov, se postupně emancipuje od všech myšlenkových procesů a slouží pouze ideologickým traktátům. Ty ovšem jsou mechanickou kompilací slov; uvažování je nežádoucí.“

is typical of that, as well as reassuring (MACURA 2008, p. 188). “There is little that totalitarian propaganda takes greater care of than to suggest and push through the idea that you can always choose from only two options (FIDELIUS 2000, p. 89).”¹³ The dichotomist distinction between *us* and *them* is typical.

The totalitarian language has a monopoly on the interpretation of reality. Its extension to all spheres of society eventually causes that those who do not use it find themselves isolated from the rest of that society. And because the creation of separate social groups is not allowed in a totalitarian society, and anyone who rejects the totalitarian language excludes himself from the social discourse. Whoever violates this system is excluded from it, because he would threaten its functioning. He may be able to operate within its boundaries, but the system will not understand him and he will not understand it. Communication thus becomes impossible and an exclusion from the discourse is implicit.

The world of *1984* and *newspeak* is based on the nominalistic idea that if it becomes impossible to express the reality in words, its understanding in human minds will change. And that change of words and their content will leave minds as well. However, this notion is erroneous, because reality does not change with the change of symbols. It only happens that these symbols lose their meaning. Thus it becomes more difficult, although not impossible, to communicate meanings.

Consequently, totalitarian language can never reach its goal, because it is not able to grasp the depth of human thought and intelligence. The limitation of words and their quantity would be a brilliant tool of control, were it to lead to a reduction of thinking. But this goal can never be reached, since thinking is of a higher order than language.

However, since with the loss of symbols (if this happens on both sides of the communication flow), ideas become non-communicable, they remain only in the minds of those, who do not give in to this new language. Limiting language therefore truly does mean the restriction of thought and is therefore an effective tool of totalitarianism; although only down to the qualitative (depth of influence on human thought) and quantitative (number of affected persons in the system) the extent to which it is able to penetrate.

The Language of Czechoslovakia in 1948-1989

The regime of Czechoslovakia in 1948-1989 met the definition of a totalitarian regime under which I understand a *political regime, which through a single centre of power seeks to exercise, under one accepted ideology, absolute power over individuals*. This definition is

¹³ Translated from Czech: „Na ničem si totalitní propaganda nedává tak záležet jako na tom, aby vám sugerovala, že můžete volit vždy jen ze dvou možností.“

supported by the claim that “totalitarianism means imprisonment of the whole society within the state, emphasizes an omnipresent penetration of political power into the spheres of human life, which are not political (DVOŘÁKOVÁ, KUNC 1994, p. 44).”¹⁴

I have therefore been curious if this regime created a specific language, which it would use to dominate the society. A positive answer to this question is suggested by the recently published Dictionary of the Communist Totalitarian Language (ČERMÁK, CVRČEK, SCHMIEDTOVÁ 2010). It recognizes that the language of Czechoslovakia in this period had created a parallel vocabulary (*podpultovka* X *scarce commodity*), contained specific evaluative elements such as (*American imperialist* X *fraternal invasion*), created new collocations (*the working class, struggle for peace*), operated with clear and simple slogans (*With the Soviet Union forever and never otherwise!, Proletarians of all countries, unite!*), created new words and their combinations with the intention of creating new connotations, caused speech trivialization, created clear evaluative categories, etc. This specific language also used euphemisms and reduced the vocabulary (ČERMÁK, CVRČEK, SCHMIEDTOVÁ 2010, p. 17).

As is apparent, many of the elements we have mentioned are consistent with what Orwell pointed out as characteristics of totalitarian languages and what we demonstrated on examples of other linguistic thinkers. This paper aims to look at how the regime communicated this language with the public. In order to look at this issue a qualitative analysis of selected copies of the daily journal *Rudé Právo*, the primary channel of communication of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1948-1989, was produced. The front pages of *Rudé Právo* from the first days and months in 1970 served as examples, on which elements of totalitarian language were traced and examined. Individual stories formed the basic analytical unit.

The analysis revealed a number of interesting facts. One of them is the confirmation of the earlier statement that words acquire their meaning primarily in their context and syntax, and not as isolated units. Should we analyse the semantic meaning of words by studying them as isolated components in sentences, we would necessarily fail to arrive at satisfactory data and by analogy satisfactory conclusions. Other than the changes in the meanings of individual lexical units in comparison with their current semantic meanings, or those that they carried before being changed by the totalitarian power, the analysis revealed a number of other elements that will now be mentioned in an overview.

¹⁴ Translated from Czech: „totalitářství označuje uvěznění celé společnosti uvnitř státu, zdůrazňuje všudypřítomné pronikání politické nadvlády nad mimopolitickým životem člověka.“

Primarily it is necessary to mention the different function of language and its tools and therefore implicitly of its usage in totalitarian regimes. The usage of language in *Rudé Právo* clearly shows that its primary role was not to inform, but rather to influence. Therefore a frequent theme of the opening articles of the newspaper is the work achievements scored by particular factories, professions or groups. The overfulfilment of work plans, the unity of workers, an increase in production and continuous development is often mentioned as well. We have recurrent references here that similar successes can be seen across the country, emphasizing the unity of all workers and their joint effort to transport the society towards better and brighter tomorrows.

Thematization is an interesting aspect, which aptly illustrates the use of language to exercise power in a totalitarian society. A very common theme apart from work, which is mentioned in one way or another in most articles, and the fulfilment and overfulfilment of the work plan, which was already mentioned, is the "struggle for peace". A continuous emphasis placed on brotherhood, unity, cooperation and friendship, especially with the Soviet Union and the neighbouring socialist countries, is a frequent theme of many of the featured articles. These elements are moreover often put into contrast with the enemy countries, which are portrayed negatively. However, quite surprisingly, there are very few articles dealing with foreign events on the pages of *Rudé Právo*. Any reports from abroad usually relate to the Socialist Bloc and/or other friendly countries. The coverage of events in the United States is minimal on the pages of *Rudé Právo*. Any filtered reports are negative although a neutral report on U.S. superiority over the USSR in the race for space, somehow found its way into the print. However, other reports on the United States are negative, although this aspect is not always explicitly aggressive and is relegated to the connotative level.

A lot of articles place significant emphasis on unity. The need for the unity of the Communist Party and its members, the socialist bloc and friendly countries, workers and communities, youth, leaderships and many other subsystems of society is stressed. This emphasis on unity is nearly equal to to the emphasis on work.

A frequent motive, although it is necessary to take into account the historical context, is the "exchange of party cards". Although this issue is tied to a particular historical period of the normalization era, and therefore it can reasonably be assumed that at a later or earlier time this topic did not appear on the pages of *Rudé Právo*, we cannot play it down, as it is closely related to another common theme, which is the emphasis on purity and the purification of the party and the ideology. This applies to reactionaries, right-wing opportunists, treacherous intellectuals, confused chief executives and reformers and other similarly abhorrent

individuals or groups. The common denominator of these and other efforts is, however, another motive, which is progress. The constant look forward to the future, the increase in production, and the rise in quality and similar illustrations share this common denominator. Another omnipresent aspect on the pages of *Rudé Právo* is connected to progress, and that is optimism. Reports are written in an optimistic, positive, joyful and almost carefree and naive spirit, which gives the desired impression that “crops have come home”. If a negative report regarding Czechoslovakia or a friendly country is published, it is immediately dismissed as insignificant or properly dealt with.

There is also a radical discrepancy in the news values as presented on the pages of *Rudé Právo*. While at present the media organizations prefer to print or broadcast news which inform of a change, conflict or surprise, the case was exactly the opposite with the analysed sample. It is evident that at least in the period under review the messages that informed about the continuation of current events, such as manufacturing or mining, were preferred. It is exactly the kind of information that was most likely to occupy the front page.

A frequent topic in different variants on the pages of *Rudé Právo* is fight and struggle. It can be a struggle against something, such as subversive right-wing forces, imperialism or an enemy; or it might be the fight for something, such as the spread of Marxism-Leninism, for the purity of the party, the building of socialism etc. Fight and struggle is omnipresent on the pages of *Rudé Právo*. This is not surprising if one considers the revolutionary nature of the communist ideology. Besides the fight and struggle, there is yet another interesting aspect present in *Rudé Právo*, namely the frequent use of dichotomies and oppositions, in particular ‘we’ and ‘them’, where ‘we’ can represent the party, supporters of Marxism-Leninism or the socialist bloc and ‘they’ can represent imperialists, right-wing forces or reactionaries.

The continued emphasis on collectivism, society, unity and uniformity, as well as the rejection of any forms of pluralism, whether of thought or conduct, has already been mentioned, but it is this unity and collectivism which was rather interestingly distorted by the pragmatic construction of certain press articles.

These apparently operate on the assumption that what is important is not the actual event but who was present to it. In regard to the cult of personality or functions this is particularly apparent in stories reporting on various delegations and visits, red letter days and celebrations naming the names of significant guests, which often amount to reciting the names of all those present. We can but construe that the stories produced in this fashion aimed to support the idea of unity of the party, the its representatives’ rapport with society and emphasizing that such positions mean little in comparison with the collective. Nevertheless

the constant naming of those present is in contrast with the covert and explicit emphasis placed on collectivism rather than on the individual, which is defended by the communist ideology.

Implications of the use of totalitarian language

As we demonstrated in the previous part of this paper the Czechoslovak regime in 1948-1989 did indeed create a totalitarian language. Why such language cannot succeed in its role of controlling the society was explained by its limited capacity to capture the reality and the breadth and depth of thought. Nevertheless its inability to succeed does not mean that its creation and usage do not have negative consequences.

Orwell claims that “all past oligarchies have lost their power because they either became too rigid or too soft. Either became silly and or became arrogant, unable to adapt to changed circumstances and were overthrown; or become liberal and cowardly, made concessions where they should have used violence, and were overthrown. It could be said that the cause of their downfall was both consciousness and unconsciousness. The party managed to create such a system of thought in which both can exist simultaneously. On no other intellectual basis could the masterdom of the Party be sustained. If anyone is to rule permanently, he must be able to reverse the sense of reality. The secret of governing lies in combining the faith in one’s own infallibility with the ability to learn from past mistakes (ORWELL 2009, p. 189).”¹⁵

In essence, Deutsch’s communication theory, which perceives the loss of power as a communication failure, argues analogically. Because “information transfer is apparently the major component of power (DEUTSCH 1971, p. 299),”¹⁶ if any system is failing in the process of transferring information, it is also failing in its communication function. And because its capacity to learn and adaptation is therefore distorted, it can’t react to inputs with corresponding outputs and as a result of this inability fails in the vital function of internal system reformulation and adaptation, based on the existence of feedback loops, which ensure the flow of information (REINHOLD 1998, p. 110).

Deutsch’s communication theory, based on the cybernetic approach of Norbert Wiener and the system approach of Talcott Parsons, deems the flow of information necessary for the

¹⁵ Translated from Czech: „všechny minulé oligarchie přišly o moc proto, že buď zkoztnatěly, nebo změkly. Buďto zhlouply a staly se arogantními, nedovedly se přizpůsobit změněným podmínkám a byly svrženy; nebo se staly liberálními a zbabělými, dělaly ústupky tam, kde by měly použít násilí, a byly svrženy. Dalo by se říci, že příčinou jejich pádu bylo jednak vědomí, jednak nevědomí. Straně se podařilo vytvořit takový systém myšlení, v němž obojí může existovat současně. Na žádném jiném intelektuálním základě by nemohlo být panství Strany trvalé. Jestliže má někdo vládnout natrvalo, musí umět zvrátit smysl skutečnosti. Tajemství vládnutí spočívá totiž v tom, jak spojit víru ve vlastní neomylnost se schopností učit se z minulých chyb.“

¹⁶ Translated from Czech: „přenos informace je zřejmou hlavní složkou moci.“

learning process, which is necessary for the existence of the political system. Learning works on the basis of feedback and information transfer. For a system to learn and develop itself, respond to inputs and outputs from its environment and thus maintain its viability, it must be stirred up from its equilibrium. This stirring up happens on the basis of reception of information (DEUTSCH 1971, p. 254-255). A system, which, due to its inability to adapt to its surroundings, is unable to achieve its goals, cannot survive (BYEON 2005, p. 227). However, the preservation of its own existence is the primary objective of every system must therefore receive information, which is considered to be a key element of power also by Easton (EASTON 1965), Studer (STUDER 1972, p. 347), Fagen (FAGEN 1966, p. 5) and others.

Totalitarian regimes use totalitarian language for the creation of an easily controllable mass society and as a tool for keeping power by spreading the dominant ideology. But using language for spreading an ideology instead of transferring information is incompatible with the viability of the system, because the system that abandons the communicative function of the language, which is crucial for the survival of the system, will necessarily fail and collapse. A one-way information flow from the system control to its subsystems is not sufficient for the viability of the system. If the steering of the system does not reflect the incoming information which comes from its surroundings and from inside itself, it is unable to adequately respond to these inputs, and consequently it degenerates and collapses.

According to Deutsch, political systems are communication networks that operate on the basis of information exchange. The ability of the systems to respond to changes in their surroundings and implicitly their ability to maintain power and achieve their goals depends on the flow of information. This communication exchange of information is essential for the survival of any cybernetic system. Without such exchange of information, systems are not able to survive. However, while on the axis, where at one end we have the democratic type and the opposite end is the totalitarian type, it is on the democratic end where a complete reciprocal exchange of information takes place, on the totalitarian end and no reciprocal exchange of information is happening. This aspect, which prevents the flow of information in totalitarian system, is destructive for it.

We have witnessed these phenomena in the communist regime of Czechoslovakia in the years 1948-1989 and it was one of the reasons that led to the downfall of the regime. Communication failure eventually led to the inability of the regime to maintain power and control.

Political Correctness

Thus far we have concentrated in our analysis of totalitarian language and the relationship between language and totalitarianism on totalitarian political systems. However, Deutsch's communication theory claims that any cybernetic system needs to have a functional information flow. Therefore all political systems, regardless of the fact if their regimes are totalitarian, democratic or somewhere in between, need to deal with language and consequently are subject to its power potential. Language can thus be abused in any political system.

The old Plato stated in *The Republic* that the most sophisticated propaganda manages to make its force, coerciveness and violence not obvious, while its manifestations are present in the system (PIEPER 1992, p. 31). In liberal democracies power is not violent and does not use ideology to legitimise itself, but all the more it uses persuasive means to reach its goals, mainly consensus in the society. Control of the discourse plays a key role in this (VAN DIJK 1996, p. 85).

One of the phenomena of liberal democracies, which serve the establishment of consensus, is political correctness, which is a "system of beliefs and thought patterns that ... decides what and under what conditions it is possible to speak at all (BROWNE 2009, p. 29)."¹⁷

"Political correctness in the ordinary meaning of the term denotes a set of certain elements that are necessary to ensure that an act or expression of opinion can be considered to be relevant, respectively that it is not socially sanctioned. In other words we can say that political correctness is a kind of external framework of communication that must the author and the reader or listener must accept, if they want to understand each other. Therefore in this respect it has a similar role as language. (It is) required ... by certain social standards imposed on both parties - author and reader - by the society (BELLING 2006)."¹⁸

There are many parallels to be found between political correctness and totalitarian language. Like totalitarian regimes through language, political correctness seeks unity of

¹⁷ Translated from Czech: „systém přesvědčení a myšlenkových šablon, který ... rozhoduje, o čem a za jakých podmínek lze vůbec mluvit.“

¹⁸ Translated from Czech: „Politická korektnost v běžném významu tohoto pojmu označuje soubor určitých prvků, které jsou nezbytné pro to, aby určité jednání či projev názoru mohl být považován za relevantní, resp. aby nebyl společensky sankcionován. Jinými slovy lze říci, že politická korektnost je jakýmsi vnějším rámcem komunikace, který musí přijmout autor i čtenář či posluchač, pokud si vzájemně chtějí porozumět. V tomto ohledu má tedy obdobnou roli jako samotný jazyk. (Je) vyžadována ... určitými sociálními normami vnucenými oběma subjektům – autoru i čtenáři – vnější společností.“

thought and action, changes the lexical elements of language,¹⁹ does not allow alternatives if they bring negative, offensive or otherwise inappropriate connotations and controls the public discourse. The meanings of words are changed within its framework (CAMERON 1995, p. 140) and the vocabulary is reduced, stripped mainly of words which some groups find offensive (MILLER 2009, p. 61). It does so in accordance with the structuralist idea that if we purify our speech, we will not only offend anyone, but we will also change our minds about the expressed facts and achieve changes in the society. Therefore it tries to establish a unity of thought and action by eliminating certain ways of thinking and applying standards of acceptable behaviour. In order to reach this goal it adopts totalitarian elements (MILLER 2009, p. 60). Whoever does not accept them is excluded from the decent society and the accepted discourse in the same way as someone is excluded from the totalitarian society if he has not embraced the totalitarian language. Balík and Kubát point on the fact by saying that “if a politician claims that anyone who doesn’t agree with his political stance or policy is an extremist, he automatically politically eliminates his political opponents regardless of the quality of their arguments (BALÍK, KUBÁT 2004, p. 14).”²⁰

We see manifestations of political correctness primarily in language. Established signs are replaced with new concepts that change the meaning of the signified. A classic example is racial designation. The word *gypsy* in the Czech language was replaced by *Rom*, although the new sign certainly is not an equivalent, rather a narrowing of one ethnic group to its subgroup. Similarly, the word *nigger* in the United States was gradually replaced by *black* and *coloured* and nowadays has the form of *African-American*.²¹

Another classic example is gender-correct speech.²² In an effort to empower women to remedy the inequality between men and women measures were taken and feminist versions of masculine names were created. . In addition, the usual tool for maintaining gender equality is speaking without gender connotations. Instead of *mother* or *father* the word *parent* is thus preferably used.

¹⁹ Instead of *cikán* we use *Rom*, and instead of *bastard* we nowadays use the term „child out of bedlock, and instead of “old” we use senior etc.

²⁰ Translated from Czech: „vyjádří-li se politik v tom smyslu, že každý, kdo nesouhlasí s jeho politickým postojem, či výtvořem, je extremist, automaticky politicky likviduje své politické protivníky bez ohledu na kvalitu jejich argumentů.“

²¹ It is nonetheless natural that if a labelling of a specific ethnic group is pejorative in a given language that an effort is made to find an acceptable equivalent for the negatively connotated label. The mere chase of words thus need not be of a totalitarian nature or have such a motivation. It can nevertheless be an indication of such tendencies.

²² Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport published a booklet on how to express oneself in a gender-correct manner *Kultura genderově vyváženého vyjadřování*.

In the same way in which in totalitarian regimes changes in language are only a tool and the first step to the transformation of the society, the transformation of language due to political correctness can be seen as the first step toward correct behaviour. Language and action correctness is complemented with the correctness of thought. It is only the “acquisition of a state of full auto regulation of thought and a new set of moral standards and consciousness of what is and is not acceptable and appropriate, what is the ultimate goal of political correctness (BELLING 2006).”²³

It could, however, be legitimately argued that these manifestations of political correctness are just a consequence of a legitimate effort to establish equality in the society, which is the cornerstone of modern liberal democracies. However, this effort to apply new political doctrines and principles, carried out by specific groups, must naturally also be based on a change of language, immanently totalitarian in nature. Language was never value or politically neutral and was and always will be a reflection of the specific political and social environment in which it is used. Political correctness can thus also be considered merely a manifestation of this potential.

Conclusion

The power potential of language was outlined in this paper through an analysis of selected approaches to the study of language, particularly the semiotic approach of Ferdinand de Saussure and the approach of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Subsequently, the concept of the totalitarian language and its theoretical and practical manifestations were dealt with, illustrated in particular through the works of George Orwell. A separate part of the paper was dedicated to a study of the language of the totalitarian regime governing Czechoslovakia in 1948-1989, which was based on a qualitative analysis of the paper *Rudé Právo*. On the basis of the communication theory of K. W. Deutsch, the totalitarian language was subsequently put in context with the issue of sustainability of political systems. It was noted that the use of totalitarian language by political regimes is unsustainable in the long run and malignant in regard to their viability. In this context it was pointed out that totalitarian tendencies of language are not the exclusive preserve of totalitarian regimes, but are immanently present in all political systems because every cybernetic system has to communicate. The problem of political correctness and its analogy with the concept of the totalitarian language was pointed out at the end of the paper.

²³ Translated from Czech: „dosažení stavu plné autoregulace myšlení a nastavení nových morálních kritérií a vědomí toho, co je a co není přijatelné a vhodné, je konečným cílem politické korektnosti.“

It is safe to conclude that any system which wants to retain the ability to adapt to changing conditions and thus enhance its viability, must reflect the problem of communication flows and maintain its status in good condition in terms of receiving information. Any other use of the language is undesirable and dangerous for the political system and its viability.

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