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MANIPULATION AND MECHANISMS OF TOTALITARIAN DICTATORSHIP CONTROL THROUGH NEWSPEAK AND WOODEN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the role and impact of Newspeak and wooden language during dictatorships throughout different political regimes where a totalitarian atmosphere ruled and controlled all human senses, thoughts or acts. Under regimes such as Italian Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism totalitarian language seems to be a favorable way to explore the "dark side" of conceptual history, constituted by symbols rather than words. Newspeak is a concept more widely recognized in the French culture as "langue de bois" than in the English culture and certainly familiar to the cultures that experienced totalitarianism other than through the cartoon characters of the "Animal Farm", George Orwell's satirical allegorical novella. The concept of "bois" or "wooden language" has been explored by several writers, though the specific term bois might not always be used explicitly. However, many authors have written about language that is rigid, formal, artificial, or detached from emotional or authentic expression. These writers often explore how language can be used as a tool of power, control, or alienation or how it can serve as a metaphor for emotional or social stasis.

Language is merely a tool that can be manipulated by people, derived either by good or ill intentions, to persuade other people. In the hands of people like dictators, however, it becomes a very dangerous tool, because they are those who mostly benefit from this encoding skill effectively to legalize their governments. They can use it to tyrannize people, to ignite conflicts between them, or to gather and galvanize them to fight the dictator's wars, without them knowing it.

Keywords: Newspeak, wooden language, dictatorship, totalitarianism, manipulation, Nazism, Fascism, Stalinism.

The language in totalitarian dictatorships: communication tool or weapon?

Language, as both a medium of communication and a carrier of culture and thought, has always been a battleground for autonomy and manipulation. Being a dictator means having absolute power and control over a country or government, typically without the consent of the people or any checks and balances, by using the principles of Newspeak as a totalitarian language as well¹. A dictator rules through force, fear, and manipulation and not through democratic processes or shared authority. Dictatorships usually limit or eliminate civil liberties, such as

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¹ Douglas, C. Youvan, *The Semiotics of Newspeak: Language, Power, and Thought Control in Orwell's 1984*, March 2024, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.32611.57128, p. 2, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379404191_The_Semiotics_of_Newspeak_Language_Power_and_Thought_Control_in_Orwell's_1984, p. 2.

freedom of speech, the press, and assembly, and they often rely on propaganda to maintain control. The term *dictator* is historically rooted in ancient Rome, where a dictator was a leader given temporary emergency powers to make decisions during times of crisis. In modern usage, and nowadays, it refers to a leader who holds unchallenged power, mostly through authoritarian or totalitarian tools.

Dictators' language, both spoken and written, serves as a powerful tool for consolidating power, manipulating public perception, and maintaining control, by using specific rhetorical techniques and strategies to shape the way people think, behave, and feel. George Orwell's *1984* is a work in dystopian literature, offering a grim portrayal of a future where totalitarian control pervades every aspect of human life. George Orwell's fictional language extends beyond the narrative of his famous book *1984*, reflecting broader implications for the role of language in society. The idea that language can become a battleground for autonomy and manipulation stems from its dual role as a tool for communication and a carrier of culture and thought. Language's power to shape our thoughts and actions makes it a valuable tool for both empowering individuals and controlling them². To resort to dictators' linguistic attitude, there is clear evidence of their discourse in exaggerated terms about their own greatness, the strength of the nation under their rule, or the enemies they face and this is to create a sense of infallibility and to rally people around them. They commonly use language to divide society into *us* (the righteous, the nation, and the supporters) and *them* (the enemy, traitors, and the opposition), this helps to build a sense of loyalty among supporters and demonizes those who challenge them. They often use language to identify a specific group, country, or ideology as the root of all problems, blaming them for the nation's struggles. Totalitarian power has a real stake in language and aims to dominate it³.

They distort history to suit their narrative, claiming credit for past successes and rewriting history to vilify opponents and legitimize their own rule and frequently repeat simple, catchy phrases or slogans, this repetition reinforcing ideas by making them easier to accept as truth. Their language is simplistic and designed to appeal directly to people's emotions and complex political realities are reduced to simple binaries: good versus evil, the nation versus its enemies. Dictators use language to delegitimize critics and opposition voices, labeling them as traitors, foreign agents, or mentally unstable, with threats of violence or punishment being a common part of a dictator's rhetoric. Therefore, this language is meant to intimidate both the public and political adversaries. When dictators face real or perceived enemies, they use dehumanizing language to strip their opponents of dignity and humanity, making it easier for supporters to justify violence or repression.

A common trope in a dictator's language is positioning themselves as the only one capable of saving the nation from impending doom or destruction, most commonly through extreme measures. These leaders control the narrative by restricting the flow of information and may have state-controlled media or demand that certain ideas are continually broadcast to the public while suppressing alternative viewpoints.

To be a dictator means to be the one who speaks and the one for whom speaking mostly matters, knowing that dictators speak through the voice of authority and by means of language.

² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

³ Courtine, Jean-Jacques and Willett, Laura, "A Brave New Language: Orwell's Invention of Newspeak in *1984*", *JSTOR Collection, Substance*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Issue 50 (1986), published by The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 69, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3684756>.

People listen to them even when they are wrong since language plays the role of a vehicle to end justifications⁴.

Dictators manipulate language to legitimize their commands, embedding the essence of authority throughout their speeches, frequently using slogans or a carefully chosen structure and vocabulary. For example, Hitler, one of the most notorious figures in history, strategically selects his language (terms like *my comrades*, *my countrymen*) to subtly inject his ideology.

Dictators' discourses shape the beliefs, emotions, and actions of both their supporters and their opponents and by controlling language, they control the narrative and create a sense of inevitability about their rule. In times of crisis, this kind of language is used to justify extraordinary measures and repressive actions, framing them as necessary for the survival of the nation. In essence, the dictators' language serves to consolidate power, suppress dissent, create an image of authority and invincibility, mobilize followers, and demonize opponents. If we are thinking of the rhetoric of historical dictators like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, or Kim Jong-un, it becomes clear how their language helped to manipulate mass populations, create a cult of personality and justify brutal actions.

Leaders in a totalitarian regime are typically characterized by their absolute control over all aspects of society, from politics and the economy to culture, education, and even personal behavior, and in such a system, the leaders are elevated to a near-divine status, and their authority is unchallenged. They seek to create a uniform, ideologically driven society where dissent is not tolerated, totalitarian leaders generally employing a combination of force, propaganda, and surveillance to maintain their power. Therefore, the purposes of weaponized language are to control thought, suppress dissent, glorify the leader, justify violence, and rewrite reality. In totalitarian systems, language serves basic communicative functions or tools such as conveying official policies or orders from the government, maintaining bureaucracy through instructions, forms, and regulations, and creating a sense of unity or ideology through slogans and speeches, this communication being one-directional, from the regime to the people, with very limited room for genuine dialogue.

Within this framework, the linguistic aspect of communication should be mentioned. While in the case of long-established 'state-national' cultures, it was obvious that language 'created unified fields of exchange and communication'⁵, and learning the literary language was one of the conditions for achieving full possession of civic rights⁶, but the linguistic situation was different in the case of non-dominant ethnic groups. It is clear evidence that extreme nationalist rhetoric, bearing an intolerant nature, has historically contributed to ethnic cleansing, civil wars, and genocides⁷. Language undoubtedly becomes weaponized when it is used to control thought (Orwell's concept in *1984*), through *newspeak*, where limiting vocabulary reduces the ability to think critically or rebel, and when it is used to propagate ideology through slogans like "War is Peace" or "Obedience is Freedom", where repeating them embeds paradoxical ideas that suppress

⁴ Khany, Reza and Hamzelou, Zohre, "A Systemic Functional Analysis of Dictators' Speech: Toward a Move-based Model", in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98 (2014) 917 – 924, p. 918.

⁵ Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, in Stephen Seidman and al. *The New Social Theory Reader*, 2nd, edition, Routledge, 2008, p. 47.

⁶ Gellner, Ernest, *An Alternative Vision*, in E. Gellner (ed.), *Encounters with Nationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 263.

⁷ Conversi, Daniele, *Genocide, ethnic cleansing and nationalism*, in Delanty, Gerard and Kumar, Krishan, (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, SAGE Publications, London, UK, 2006, pp. 321.

dissent⁸. This type of language is also oriented to demonize enemies, labeling people as “traitors,” “saboteurs” or “enemies of the state” which obviously justifies persecution. Instilling fear and loyalty are also a dominant feature of this discourse, through euphemisms or coded language (purge, reeducation) that disguise brutal actions and rewriting reality during these regimes may alter historical narratives, facts, or definitions to align with their version of truth. So, language is more than a neutral tool, it becomes a strategic weapon used to manipulate, control, and oppress, and the line between communication and coercion blurs, as the regime shapes how people think, speak, or perceive reality.

To demonstrate through concrete examples, we have resorted to the Fascist (1922-1943), Nazi (1933-1945), and Stalinist (1924-1953) totalitarian languages and their linguistic practices, with a focused overview of how language was weaponized, turning into a tool of domination, indoctrination, and dehumanization.

Echoes of Il Duce and the voice of Fascism in word and deed

The Fascist regime in Italy, mostly under Benito Mussolini (1922–1943), made strategic and intensive use of language as a tool of power, persuasion, and control, the regime’s manipulation of language being not just rhetorical, but foundational to building consensus, shaping ideology and enforcing conformity. Fascist control of daily life reached right down to the most basic levels. In 1938 the government imposed the use of *Voi* as the formal pronoun instead of *Lei* and banned handshakes in all places of public work. Foreign words and names were replaced. *Bordeaux* became *Barolo*, the *film* became *pellicola*, and German place names were Italianized. The walls of offices, schools, and public buildings were covered with slogans and murals paying homage to Mussolini and Fascism, such as “Mussolini is always right” or “Better to live one day as a lion than 100 years as a sheep”⁹.

Fascist leaders understood that controlling public discourse meant controlling how people thought and acted, Mussolini himself being a journalist who knew how to craft emotionally charged, authoritative, and mobilizing language.

Mussolini was presented as *Il Duce* (*The Leader*), a term that became iconic and symbolic of absolute authority and language glorified him as a savior, a warrior, and a visionary, creating a mythic persona. Media, schools, and public events reinforced this image relentlessly and inexorably, the Fascist regime’s language turning into a powerful instrument of psychological manipulation, ideological conditioning, and authoritarian control. It relied on simplified truths, emotional resonance, and constant repetition to reshape reality and enforce compliance. George Orwell later drew from Fascist rhetoric to inspire Newspeak in his 1984, showing just how central the manipulation of language is in totalitarian regimes.

Slogans were memorable, simple, and emotionally evocative, aimed at suppressing critical thought and unifying the population, and speeches were filled with militaristic, and mythologizing rhetoric, such as: “Believe, obey, fight” (*Credere, obbedire, combattere*); “War is to man what maternity is to woman”, “Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State”. Transnational history transcends Italian Fascism and Mussolini’s attempt to fascize Europe and the rest of the world is one of its main focuses¹⁰.

⁸ Orwell George, “1984”, Signet Classics Publishing House, New American Library, 2023, pp. 18-19.

⁹ Di Palma, Giuseppe, *Italy: Is there a Legacy and Is it Fascist?*, J. Herz (ed.), From Dictatorship to Democracy, Greenwood Press, 1982, p. 143.

¹⁰ Pili, Jacopo, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism*, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 58 (2), 2023, p. 355.

The Fascist regime censored the press, controlled publishing, banned foreign or dissenting views, and newspapers, books, radio, and film had to promote official ideology and avoid anything “anti-Fascist”, and therefore language was standardized, and dialects or foreign influences were discouraged, aiming to create a pure national identity.

Public ceremonies, marches, and speeches were staged performances, saturated with ritualistic language and symbolism like Roman salutes, imperial imagery, and references to ancient Rome, and language was ceremonial and theatrical and meant to evoke emotion and collective identity rather than logical persuasion. Fascist language aimed to rewrite national history to serve the regime’s narrative, terms like “rebirth,” “regeneration” or “Romanità”, which means the spirit of ancient Rome were used to frame Fascism as a return to national greatness. Language was used to create enemies like communists, Jews, and liberals and promote a binary worldview of us vs. them. Youth were indoctrinated and schools taught children to speak the language of Fascism, memorize slogans, and participate in rallies. Mussolini and its Fascist regime resorted to fascist wooden language because he understood that language was essential to gaining, maintaining, and legitimizing power. After World War I, Italy was deeply divided: politically fragmented, economically unstable, and socially disillusioned Mussolini used powerful, mythic language to forge a sense of collective identity, drawing on glorified history, with references to the Roman Empire, nationalist sentiment, and simplified binaries while comparing Fascism vs. chaos or strength vs. weakness, which helped unify a fractured population under a single vision: a strong, reborn Italy. He did not want just passive support, but active participation, and thus his language was aggressive, emotional, and action-oriented, filled with imperatives such as “Believe, Obey, Fight” and conceived to stir patriotic fervor and inspire loyalty. The goal was certainly to move people emotionally, not just rationally, mobilizing them as soldiers of the regime.

By using authoritarian and absolutist language, Mussolini constructed himself as Il Duce, a leader above party politics, embodying the will of the nation and fascist Newspeak portrayed him as infallible and divinely destined, presented the state as supreme and equated obedience with patriotism, which helped reinforce Mussolini’s personal power and dismantle democratic norms. Critics were labeled as anti-national, degenerate, or enemies of the state, and rhetorical violence was used to dehumanize opposition (socialists, communists, and Jews) and complex or critical language was replaced by simplistic slogans to prevent questioning.

In Mussolini’s vision, war was framed as natural and noble, and sacrifice for the nation was heroic. Individualism was condemned, collectivism under the state was glorified and by repeating these messages, he normalized Fascist values and made alternatives unthinkable. Textbooks were rewritten to reflect Fascist ideology and language was stripped of nuance or critical inquiry. Mussolini’s attitudes were highly theatrical, his opinions were contradictory, his facts were often wrong, and his attacks were frequently malicious and misdirected; but his words were so dramatic, his metaphors so apt and striking, his vigorous, repetitive gestures so extraordinarily effective, that he rarely failed to impose his mood¹¹. At the same time, he was gaining a reputation as a young man of strange magnetism and remarkable rhetorical talents.

Fascist indoctrination was never really successful, but the press was strictly censored, motion picture newsreels were largely government propaganda and the regime controlled the

¹¹ Hibbert, Christopher, *Benito Mussolini Italian dictator*, available at <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Benito-Mussolini/Role-in-World-War-II>.

new radio broadcasting. It also ran semi-compulsory Fascist youth movements, and new textbooks were imposed in schools. Moreover, the government provided mass leisure activities, such as sports, concerts, and seaside holidays, which were genuinely popular¹².

Therefore, Benito Mussolini's dictatorial regime in Italy was a pioneering example of fascist rule in 20th-century Europe that gradually dismantled Italy's democratic institutions. The regime with its Newspeak and wooden language aimed to control all aspects of life: political, cultural, and economic, and also to suppress class conflict and control the economy, though it mostly served business interests. We know that when language is simplified or restricted, it becomes harder to think critically or imagine alternatives to the status quo. Newspeak masks the truth, destroys individual expression, eliminates nuanced vocabulary and people lose the tools to conceptualize and even desire those ideas. This happened, as in many other dictatorships, in Italy, too, where Newspeak redefined reality, reframed history, reinforced doublethink, and devaluated human life.

The power of words. Nazi language as a weapon of ideological control and social engineering

Hitler's totalitarian regime was built on fascism, extreme nationalism, and antisemitism. Leaders like him in Nazi Germany used language to craft a vision of a unified, superior Aryan race. He led Germany into World War II, which resulted in the deaths of millions. He manipulated language to create a common enemy (the Jews, for instance), using dehumanizing language to justify violence. Dictators today use similar tactics to unite the people against a perceived foreign or internal enemy, whether it's a neighboring country, political dissidents, or minority groups.

In this context, the Nazi regime used language as a weapon to change public perception, control minds, demonize enemies (Jews, communists, and others were called *Untermenschen*, sub-humans, dehumanizing them to justify persecution and genocide)¹³ justify violence, manipulate truth and reality, dehumanize targeted groups, promote absolute loyalty and create a cult of obedience to Adolf Hitler and Nazi ideology. Propaganda slogans such as *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* (*One People, One Empire, One Leader*) promoted absolute loyalty to Hitler, and nationalism and book burning and censorship were also witnesses to manipulation acts, disdain, and disregard. Books by Jewish, socialist, or liberal thinkers were burned, and language that contradicted Nazi ideology was literally erased. Radio broadcasts, newsreels, and propaganda films created a sense of unity, reinforced racial stereotypes, and propagated Hitler's leadership. Propaganda posters, newspapers, and magazines flooded public spaces, saturating the visual landscape with Nazi imagery and messages¹⁴.

Nazi language used euphemisms and obfuscation, and words were deliberately chosen to hide the horrific reality of Nazi policies. We will present below some of the expressions that reveal such a petty and trivial vocabulary:

¹² Di Palma, Giuseppe; Wickham, Christopher John, *The Fascist Era*, The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8 Juin, 2025.

¹³ *Deceptive Definitions: The Use of Language During the Holocaust*, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust remembrance Center, 2022.

¹⁴ Dhiman, Bharat, *Media in Weimar and Nazi Germany: A Critical Review*, 2023, p. 5, available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4498020.

Euphemism	Real Meaning
<i>Final Solution</i>	Genocide of the Jewish people
<i>Resettlement</i>	Deportation to concentration/extermination camps
<i>Special treatment</i>	Execution (often in gas chambers)
<i>Protective custody</i>	Arrest without trial
<i>Cleansing, evacuation, exit</i>	Mass murder or forced displacement

One of the founders of the postwar Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, Holocaust survivor Nachman Blumental, authored *Slowa Niewinne (Innocent Words)*, a glossary of Nazi euphemisms or words that were less innocent than their meanings. Blumental's dictionary reveals the true nature of George Orwell's "doublespeak" even before 1984 was published. The dictionary demonstrates the intention behind words the Nazis used to normalize, obscure, and soften the mass genocide being carried out. His archive of writings also contains aspects of Jewish life before and during the war, such as songs and poetry from the ghettos, including many original documents from the Łódź Ghetto. But he was especially interested in the power of language, and, in this respect, he argued that "the Nazi language was one of the most important tools used by the Germans in the physical extermination of the Jewish people". The Nazis upheld a deeply veiled language, which they used to hide their vicious goals and deceive their victims, primarily Jews. Thus, the Jew comes to inhabit through language the role which Nazi ideology accords him: that of an international vagabond, contrary to particular or local roots, who operates in a manner antagonistic towards all national values¹⁵. Before World War II, Lager simply referred to a camp with tents and a campfire, but during World War II and the rise of concentration, work, and death camps in Germany, Lager came to have a negative connotation associated with it. This is only one of the examples of how the Nazis used carefully chosen language in propaganda to seize and maintain power throughout the Nazi era¹⁶.

To illustrate, "resettlement to the east" was often used to deceive the Jews bound for extermination into thinking that they were being sent for slave labor in eastern territories. This euphemism, as well as referring to the gas chambers as "showers," were methods used to prevent mass hysteria and potential rebellion amongst their Jewish victims¹⁷. But the Nazi euphemistic language did not start with the murder of the Jews, nor was it limited to them. The imagined word "asocials", referred to the Nazis' non-political nor racial enemies, such as vagabonds and common criminals. The term *Lebensraum* (Living Space) was fabricated prior to the advent on Nazism; however, the Nazi *Lebensraum* program, which began before the war's outbreak, aimed to get rid of certain territories of non-Germanic peoples. All these happened by means of annexations and expulsions to provide more "living space" for the so-called "Aryan Germans".

¹⁵ Press, Steven M., *The Language of Ideology: Lingual Manipulation of Readers in German Literature of the Third Reich*, SM Press, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁶ Moore, Ariana, *Nazi Germany's Effects on the Modern German Language, Symposium on Undergraduate Research and Creative Expression*, 2018, p. 3.

¹⁷ Blumental, Nachman, *The Archive of Nachman Blumental*, Krakow - Lodz - Warsaw 1947, central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, November 26, 2019, pp.190-191.

Rather propaganda, whether literary or auditory, witnessed a fundamental alteration of language, an alteration that made uniform vocabulary, syntax, and hyperbole which embodied fascist ideology itself¹⁸.

There are other authors, too, trying to illustrate the power of the Nazi language, but we referred to Nachman Blumental's views, being notable for his thorough documentation and description of the systemic doublespeak and euphemisms that the Nazis employed to obscure the mechanics of mass murder, for operations that typically resulted in the death of the "evacuated".

Stalinist rhetoric as a tool of control, purification, and propaganda

Stalin, like many politicians, was an actor constructed from the outside inwards, a public figure, a politically driven personality, someone whose mental life was shaped by his public persona and by his own ideological universe¹⁹.

In the Soviet Union under Stalin (1924–1953) the role of language was an essential part of his regime's efforts to control and shape society, both ideologically and culturally and Stalin's policies around language were shaped by a combination of ideological, political, and nationalistic motives. Referring to the ideological aspect, we may state that Russian was considered as the dominant language and Stalin's government emphasized the primacy of the Russian language in the Soviet Union, especially as it was meant to unite the many different ethnic groups that lived within the empire. The notion of a "Russian-centric" Soviet identity was reinforced through education, media, and government policies because Russian was supposed to become the language of power, science, and propaganda. The government controlled what was taught in schools, broadcasted on the radio, or printed in newspapers, all in Russian, thereby pushing the language into every facet of Soviet life.

The state also imposed rigid literary and artistic norms, with Socialist Realism dictating not just the content of writing, but how it was written. Writers, poets, and playwrights were expected to adhere to the principles of clarity, optimism, and praise for the state, and literary language was shaped to fit the party's ideological message. As regards the language of nationalism and ethnic identity, Stalin initially promoted the idea of recognizing and supporting various ethnic groups and languages in the Soviet Union (especially in the 1920s), which was part of his "korenizatsiya" (indigenization) policy. This policy allowed for the use of many regional languages in education and government, but the goal was to bring these groups into the Soviet fold by controlling their national identities and making them loyal to the state.

However, in the late 1930s and 1940s, Stalin reversed this policy, pushing for a more Russian-centric Soviet identity and this was done in the name of creating a unified socialist state, but it also reflected Stalin's increasing paranoia about nationalism and the loyalty of non-Russian populations. Forced Russification of many ethnic groups occurred when the Russian language became the mandatory medium of instruction in schools, and many non-Russian languages were marginalized and this was mainly true in places like Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the Central Asian republics.

The purges of the 1930s and the Great Terror (1936–1938) had a profound impact on language use because words and expressions that were deemed "counter-revolutionary," "bourgeois" or "nationalist" were forbidden. Purges were one of the main instruments used by

¹⁸ Press, Steven M., *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Roberts, Geoffrey, *Stalin's Library. A Dictator and His Books*, printed by TJ Books, Padstow, Cornwall, 2022, p. 7.

authoritarian rulers to keep both masses and elites, including the military and security forces, in check²⁰. Language was not just a means of communication, it was a tool for surveillance and repression, and the state's control over language extended into the realm of thought, with the Soviet concept of “doublethink” becoming entrenched. People had to be cautious of what they said or wrote, as any deviation from party-approved speech could be dangerous. The “glavlit” (the main administration for censorship) had wide powers to regulate publications, ensuring that everything published aligned with Stalinist ideology and any mention of the “wrong” history or the “incorrect” view of events like the purges, was erased or rewritten.

The Stalinist cult of personality was also perpetuated through language and writers, journalists, and artists were expected to praise Stalin and the Communist Party in their work, which created an atmosphere of linguistic sycophancy, where the leader was often described in hyperbolic and grandiose terms. Thus, prose and poetry were expected to reflect the ideals of socialism and glorify the state and the most prominent writers had to conform to the Socialist Realist style, which meant that language in the arts was used to promote a very specific vision of life under Stalin, one of progress, strength and unity, despite the reality of repression and fear.

In the later years of Stalin's reign, certain languages were stigmatized or outright banned. For example, many minority languages were perceived as “counter-revolutionary” or “backward”. In the case of certain ethnic groups, such as the Crimean Tatars, Chechens, and others, their languages were prohibited as part of Stalin's policies of deportation and ethnic cleansing. In the case of entire ethnic groups who were accused of “collaborating with the enemy” (such as the Chechens during World War II), their native languages were suppressed as part of their forced resettlement, people being forced to assimilate into Russian culture and language, and many groups lost their languages over time due to these policies.

This attitude of using a manipulatory language had certainly long-term effects on language, identity, and linguistic diversity in the Soviet Union. The push for Russian language dominance meant that many Indigenous languages declined or disappeared entirely, and Russian became the lingua franca, and other languages, those in Central Asia and the Caucasus became less widely spoken over time. Stalin's language policies contributed to the larger project of cultural uniformity in the Soviet Union, where individual national identities were undermined in favor of a collective Soviet identity, one that was centered around Russian language and culture. After Stalin died in 1953, there was a gradual shift in Soviet language policies, because, under Nikita Khrushchev, there was some de-Stalinization, which included more recognition of minority cultures and languages, though the dominance of Russian remained firmly in place²¹.

Linguistic features under Stalinism can be viewed through various lenses such as censorship, language policy, language as propaganda, and the manipulation of meaning, through which Stalin's regime was able to shape public perception and enforce conformity. Invented jargon and political terms such as in the following examples were used to label and criminalize dissenters or “scapegoats”: *Enemy of the people*, *counter-revolutionary*, *kulak* (wealthy peasant). Victims were coerced into admitting crimes using rehearsed political language, turning them into *traitors* in the public eye. The cult of Stalin was an integral part of Soviet propaganda, and the language surrounding Stalin was intentionally elevated, portraying him as a near-godlike figure.

²⁰ Zakharov, Alexei; Sonin, Konstantin, *The Anatomy of the Great Terror: A Quantitative Analysis of the 1937-38 Purges in the Red Army*, The University of Chicago, 2024, p. 1.

²¹ Mc Neal, Robert, *Stalin. Man and Ruler*, Macmillan Press, Hampshire and London, 1998, p. 9.

Stalin was referred to as the “Great Leader”, the “Father of Nations” and other hyperbolic titles that turned him into a symbol of Soviet power and infallibility, and this heroic language was meant to inspire obedience and to avoid suspicion. Stalin’s speeches and writings were filled with grandiose, bombastic language, designed to depict him as the “savior” of the Soviet Union, and his speeches and writings were meticulously crafted to manipulate public perception. For example, he used the word “enemy” to refer to anyone who opposed his regime, a term that could include political rivals, intellectuals, or sometimes entire ethnic groups. The concept of “positive heroism”, the glorification of the Soviet man or woman who embodies ideal socialist values, was reflected in literature, art, and everyday language and writers were expected to use language that portrayed the Soviet system as triumphant and progressive, and the “enemy” as subhuman or evil. These are some of the mentions of how Stalinism impacted the lives of a wide variety of individuals in the Soviet Union and they include: the inner workings of the Communist party and the expectations placed on members; a contrast of the relative comfort in the lives of party members compared with the poverty and constant deprivations the average Soviet citizen faced; the omnipresent state propaganda of building a “radiant future”, the psychological impact of Stalinism on privileged insiders, the average individual and those the party labeled as outsiders and enemies²². In this context, we will notice that deviance, as manifested in defining certain acts as deviant and identifying persons as deviant by connecting them with deviant acts, comes to be seen as at least partially an effect of control²³.

The rhetorical strategy helped build the narrative of an eternal struggle between good, the Soviet Union, and evil, the West, bourgeois classes, or internal saboteurs. The Stalinist regime also used Marxist-Leninist terminology to define the world in strict ideological terms and words like class struggle, proletariat, bourgeoisie, counter-revolution, Soviet power, and *socialist construction* were essential parts of the ideological lexicon. To ensure ideological clarity and the mass appeal of official propaganda, language was simplified and reduced to its absurd connotations. This reduction of complexity can restrict people’s ability to criticize the government or even imagine alternative systems of governance and by doing so, the regime reduces the possibility of resistance or even awareness of the system’s shortcomings.

Stalin’s Socialist Realist style in literature and art promoted accessible, clear and direct language, and complicated philosophical ideas, even those in Marxism, were broken down into easily digestible concepts that could be understood by the working class.

Thus, the imposition of Russian as the dominant language, the suppression of minority languages, and the rewriting of history all served to maintain Stalin’s totalitarian power and in this environment and general circumstances, language was not just a means of communication, but a weapon in the struggle for ideological and political domination.

We may conclude by saying that Stalin’s policies surrounding language were a big part of his broader vision for control and unification, reflecting the paradox of his rule, promoting a unified Soviet identity, while simultaneously seeking to suppress and control the diverse ethnic and linguistic realities of the empire. Language became both a tool of oppression and a vehicle for ideological control, with long-lasting effects on the linguistic landscape of the Soviet Union.

²² Rossman, Jeffrey J. (2001), *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, by Sheila Fitzpatrick. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 286-288.

²³ Connor D., Walter, *The Manufacture of Deviance: The Case of the Soviet Purge, 1936-1938*, in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Aug, 1972), p. 403.

Conclusions

This study attempted to pursue as closely as the references permit the idea of how dictators manipulate the masses through language and how in the context of dictatorships, language is a powerful tool for creating and reinforcing a double consciousness. During our research, we have observed how dictators can manipulate language to construct a narrative of *superiority* reaching nationalistic rhetoric, and of *inferiority* by stigmatizing an “enemy” group that forces individuals to internalize conflicting identities.

In each case, language is not just a reflection of ideology, but it *creates* and *enforces* it. By reshaping how people talk, regimes reshape how people think. When language becomes tightly controlled, thought becomes easier to suppress. From a dictator’s perspective, he consciously restricts the use of certain words or ideas, making it illegal to speak against the regime or even to discuss concepts like democracy, equality, or freedom. By controlling vocabulary, the dictator limits the range of thoughts and action available to the people, creating a sense of political and intellectual paralysis. In their discourses, they use euphemisms and distorted language to manipulate public opinion. By renaming violence or oppression with softer terms, they create a wooden language that shields people from the harsh realities of their actions and also uses language not just to communicate, but as a means of controlling thought, shaping identity, and limiting freedom.

This manipulation is seen through the creation of an artificial language one that suppresses authentic thought, reshapes history, promotes fear, and undermines critical thinking. Manipulation of identity through language can be expanded to understand how language serves as both a tool of oppression and a tool for the liberation of thought. Consequently, it’s a language that doesn’t serve the human spirit but instead becomes something cold, mechanical, and alienating, monopolizes narrative, and is repeated in all forms of media, education, and public life, distorting the way people think and behave. By using it, dictators manipulate history by rewriting narratives to support their power and suppress any history that contradicts their version of events, glorifying and justifying their regimes.