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Real-life examples of Newspeak

A comparison to Newspeak may arguably be seen in political rhetoric, where two opposing sides string together phrases so empty of meaning that they may be compared to the taunts young children toss back and forth. The arguments of either side ultimately reduce to "I'm good; he's bad."

Charges of Newspeak are sometimes advanced when a group tries to replace a word/phrase that is politically unsuitable (e.g. "civilian casualties") or offensive (e.g. "murder") with a politically correct or inoffensive one (e.g. "collateral damage").

Some maintain that to make certain words or phrases 'unspeakable' (thoughtcrime), restricts what ideas may be held (Newspeak) and is therefore tantamount to censorship. Others believe that expunging terms that have fallen out of favour or become insulting will make people less likely to hold outdated or offensive views. The intent to alter the minds of the public through changes made to language illustrates Newspeak perfectly.

Political groups often avail themselves of the principles behind Newspeak to frame their views in a positive way. Thus the term "estate tax" was replaced by the "death tax." A similar effect may be observed in the abortion debates where those advocating restrictions on abortion label themselves "pro-life," leaving their opponents presumably "anti-life." Conversely, those advocating greater availability of abortion call themselves "pro-choice," and the opposition "anti-choice," to engender similarly positive emotions.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Another common use of Newspeak today is the overuse of abbreviations. To quote from the 1984 Appendix "It was perceived that in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it." Attention is also drawn to the use of such abbreviations by totalitarian regimes prior to World War II.

Even more powerful are acronyms like "Ofcom," "AIDS," "OPEC" and "NAFTA," which can be pronounced as if they were proper words. This is most vividly seen in an acronym like "laser," which today is nearly always written in lowercase. Acronyms contain less information than the full term and tend not to trigger spontaneous associations; this also makes them ambiguous and therefore vulnerable to misuse.

Modern Examples of Newspeak/Doublespeak

"rendition" transfer of suspected terrorists to foreign countries that practice torture for interrogation

"Healthy Forests" program logging of protected wilderness areas

"Clear Skies" initiative removing the restrictions on businesses which pollute the air

“abuses” at Abu Gharib torture
“death tax” estate tax
“insurgent” applied, in place of “freedom fighter” to those indigenous forces fighting against us
“freedom fighter” right-wing militia member trying to overthrow elected communist/socialist regime
“defense” war
“IED” bomb
“downsize” fire employees
“embedded” journalists controlled/censored journalists
“enemy combatant” P.O.W./captive
“forced disarmament” war
“human intelligence” spy
“infomercial” commercial
“House of Windsor” House of Saxe-Coburg
“person of interest” suspect
“regime change” overthrow
“pre-owned” used
“shock and awe” massive bombing
“taxpayer” citizen (implies that primary purpose of a citizen is to pay taxes)
“wet work” assassination
“terminate; neutralize” kill
“revenue enhancement” tax increase
Inheritance tax → death tax
body bag → human remains pouches → transfer tubes
system of government → regime
freedom fighter or political rebel → insurgent → terrorist
suicide bomber → homicide bomber
invasion → pre-emptive strike
invade → liberate
torture → physical persuasion
peace → pre-hostility
bomb → aerial ordinance
mercenaries → security contractors
killing → servicing the target
used → pre-owned or experienced
environmentalist → ecoterrorist
sewage → biosolids or nutricake
“weapons of mass destruction-related program activities”
“catastrophic success”
“evil doer”
coalition of the willing

Our world of doublespeak:

Let me first talk about how to make sure America is secure from a group of killers, people who hate -- you know what they hate? They hate the idea that somebody can go buy a home. They hate freedom; that's what they hate. They hate the fact that we worship freely. They don't like the thought of Christian, Jew and Muslim living side by side in peace. They don't like that at all. And therefore, they -- since they resent our freedoms, they feel like they should take out their resentment by destroying innocent lives. And this country will do everything we can possibly do to protect America. I also want the young to know that this country, we don't conquer people, we liberate people...

"I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we're really talking about peace."

— *George W. Bush*