What's New

Newspeak = Basic English

At the start of World War II, Tavistock operatives, including Brig. Gen. John Rawlings Rees in the Psychological Warfare Directorate, were busy at work on a secret language project. The target of that project was not the ``enemy,'' but the English language itself, and the English-speaking people.

The Tavistock crowd had picked up on the work of British linguist C.K. Ogden, who had created a simplified version of the English language using some 850 basic words (650 nouns and 200 verbs), with rigid rules for their use. Called ``Basic English,'' or ``Basic'' for short, the product was ridiculed by most English-speaking intellectuals; Ogden's proposal to translate Classic literature, such as Marlowe and Shakespeare, into Basic, was rightfully attacked as an effort to trivialize the greatest expressions of English-language culture.

But in the bowels of the psywar directorate, the concepts behind Basic were key to large-scale control of dangerous ``thought.'' A simplified English language limits the degrees of freedom of expression, and inhibits the transmission of meaning through metaphor. (For a more detailed discussion of language and metaphor, see Lyndon LaRouche, ``On the Subject of Metaphor,'' *Fidelio,* Fall 1992. It is then easy to create a ``reality'' that can be shaped through the mass media, such as radio. A reduced language is a straitjacket for the human mind.

The British Ministry of Information, which controlled all broadcasting and news dissemination, decided to experiment with the effectiveness of BASIC was asked to produce was asked to produce some newscasts in Basic, which were broadcast in a number of foreign sections of the BBC, including the Indian Section, which included among its operatives *1984* author George Orwell and close friend Guy Burgess, who later was to be involved in Britain's biggest postwar Soviet spy scandal. The results were carefully monitored.

Those involved quickly discovered that, with some modification, the language was ideal to present a censored, edited version of the news. Since it lent itself to simple, declarative statements, it gave those statements the character of *fact*, even though the information being reported was heavily censored or even self-admitted propaganda.

Some historians have claimed that Orwell's ``Newspeak,'' in his *1984,* is a simple parody of Basic. To the contrary: Orwell was one of the most avid supporters of the Basic concept of reduced language. What appealed to him most was its simplicity and its apparent ability to abolish ``jargon.'' He also thought that anything without real meaning, when reduced to its Basic translation, would be easily seen to be absurd. The utopian Orwell, in his letters, expressed concern over the power of the Ministry of Information (Miniform, as it was known) to control and manage the news. It was that aspect of the process, not Basic's degrading of the English language, that he parodied in *1984* with his ``Newspeak,'' controlled by Minitrue, the Ministry of Truth.

British "empires of the mind"

Following the presentation of a special report of the Ministry of Information on these findings in 1943, the Basic project was placed on ``highest priority'' in the War Cabinet, at the insistence of Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The project, now-declassified papers reveal, was to be expanded to include work in the United States. While not revealing the secret research on the psychological implications of Basic, Churchill became its cheerleader, promoting the new language as the basis for a renewed bond between Britain and its former colony, America. On Sept. 6, 1943, in a speech at Harvard University, Churchill called for ``a new Boston Tea Party,'' to overturn the English language and replace it with Basic. Telling his audience of Anglophiles that they were at the ``headstream'' of a mighty cultural sea change that would have a ``health-giving effect,'' he declared that the power to control language ``offer[s] far better prizes than taking away people's provinces or lands or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the mind.''

But the public side of the project met resistance from the British and American public, who, while not necessarily grasping the full implications of Basic, nonetheless resented being told how to speak. And there was no support forthcoming from the U.S. President, Franklin Roosevelt, who considered Basic ``silly.''

However, reports from the Ministry of Information to the special War Cabinet committee said that the language was unwieldy. Rather than overturn the English language, the reports argued, it were easier to simplify the latter's usage by example of the mass media news broadcasts. Radio newscasts, which had been made up of long descriptive commentaries before the war, took on the shorter formats that are featured today. The long sentences, often with literary overtones, gave way to shorter, more direct sentences and simple vocabulary.

Television news has adopted this linguistic style: simple direct sentences, with a very, very limited vocabulary. Television newscasts, never too informative and erudite, have become less so in recent years, as they were forcibly dumbed down. When Roone Arledge, the former head of ABC sports, took over its poorly rated news division in the mid-1970s, he demanded that news broadcasts be simplified and made easier to understand.

In a 1979 article in *Washingtonian* magazine, media expert and political scientist John David Barber supported Arledge's approach to the news, arguing that its language ``passes right over the head of the great lower half of the American electorate.'' He compiled a list of 31 words that he thought should be excised from a CBS news broadcast; included was the term ``political conspiracy.'' Wrote Barber, ``There is no way that [that] vocabulary can catch and hold the average high school graduate.'' Most news directors agree with that assessment: Vocabulary analysis of newscasts reveals that, other than specialized terms, names of places, and proper names, far less than Basic's 850-word vocabulary is employed. The vocabulary of non-news television is even more degraded and limited.

Recent studies have shown that the vocabulary of the average American, while not quite at the Basic level of 850 words (excluding proper nouns and specialized terms), is plunging toward that level.

- **The Media Cartel That Controls What You Think**, by L. Wolfe, *The American Almanac,*, May 5, 1997.
- **The Cartelization of the Media**, by Jeffrey Steinberg, *The American Almanac,*, May 5, 1997.
- **Direct British Control of the U.S. Media**, *The American Almanac,*, May 5, 1997.
- **Brainwashing: How The British Use the Media For Mass Psychological Warfare**, by L. Wolfe, *The American Almanac,*, May 5, 1997.
- **British "Fellow Travellers" Control Major U.S. Media**, by Jeffrey Steinberg, *The American Almanac,*, May 5, 1997.
- **For Whom The Polls Toll**, by L. Wolfe, *The American Almanac,*, May 5, 1997.
-

What's New with My Subject?

Operations - 100 words

come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see, send, may, will, about, across, after, against, among, at, before, between, by, down, from, in, off, on, over, through, to, under, up, with, as, for, of, till, than, a, the, all, any, every, no, other, some, such, that, this, I, he, you, who, and, because, but, or, if, though, while, how, when, where, why, again, ever, far, forward, here, near, now, out, still, then, there, together, well, almost, enough, even, little, much, not, only, quite, so, very, tomorrow, yesterday, north, south, east, west, please, yes.

Things - 400 general words

A-F

account, act, addition, adjustment, advertisement, agreement, air, amount, amusement, animal, answer, apparatus, approval, argument, art, attack, attempt, attention, attraction, authority, back, balance, base, behaviour, belief, birth, bit, bite, blood, blow, body, brass, bread, breath, brother, building, burn, burst, business, butter, canvas, care, cause, chalk, chance, change, cloth, coal, colour, comfort, committee, company, comparison, competition, condition, connection, control, cook, copper, copy, cork, cotton, cough, country, cover, crack, credit, crime, crush, cry, current, curve, damage, danger, daughter, day, death, debt, decision, degree, design, desire, destruction, detail, development, digestion, direction, discovery, discussion, disease, disgust, distance, distribution, division, doubt, drink, driving, dust, earth, edge, education, effect, end, error, event, example, exchange, existence, expansion, experience, expert, fact, fall, family, father, fear, feeling, fiction, field, fight, fire, flame, flight, flower, fold, food, force, form, friend, front, fruit

G-O

glass, gold, government, grain, grass, grip, group, growth, guide, harbour, harmony, hate, hearing, heat, help, history, hole, hope, hour, humour, ice, idea, impulse, increase, industry, ink, insect, instrument, insurance, interest, invention, iron, jelly, join, journey, judge, jump, kick, kiss, knowledge, land, language, laugh, law, lead, learning, leather, letter, level, lift, light, limit, linen, liquid, list, look, loss, love, machine, man, manager, mark, market, mass, meal, measure, meat, meeting, memory, metal, middle, milk, mind, mine, minute, mist, money, month, morning, mother, motion, mountain, move, music, name, nation, need, news, night, noise, note, number, observation, offer, oil, operation, opinion, order, organization, ornament, owner

P-Z

page, pain, paint, paper, part, paste, payment, peace, person, place, plant, play, pleasure, point, poison, polish, porter, position, powder, power, price, print, process, produce, profit, property, prose, protest, pull, punishment, purpose, push, quality, question, rain, range, rate, ray, reaction, reading, reason, record, regret, relation, religion, representative, request, respect, rest, reward, rhythm, rice, river, road, roll, room, rub, rule, run, salt, sand, scale, science, sea, seat, secretary, selection, self, sense, servant, sex, shade, shake, shame, shock, side, sign, silk, silver, sister, size, sky, sleep, slip, slope, smash, smell, smile, smoke, sneeze, snow, soap, society, son, song, sort, sound, soup, space, stage, start, statement, steam, steel, step, stitch, stone, stop, story, stretch, structure, substance, sugar, suggestion, summer, support, surprise, swim, system, talk, taste, tax, teaching, tendency, test, theory, thing, thought, thunder, time, tin, top, touch, trade, transport, trick, trouble, turn, twist, unit, use, value, verse, vessel, view, voice, walk, war, wash, waste, water, wave, wax, way, weather, week, weight, wind, wine, winter, woman, wood, wool, word, work, wound, writing, year.

Things - 200 picturable words

angle, ant, apple, arch, arm, army, baby, bag, ball, band, basin, basket, bath, bed, bee, bell, berry, bird, blade, board, boat, bone,

book, boot, bottle, box, boy, brain, brake, branch, brick, bridge, brush, bucket, bulb, button, cake, camera, card, cart, carriage, cat, chain, cheese, chest, chin, church, circle, clock, cloud, coat, collar, comb, cord, cow, cup, curtain, cushion, dog, door, drain, drawer, dress, drop, ear, egg, engine, eye, face, farm, feather, finger, fish, flag, floor, fly, foot, fork, fowl, frame, garden, girl, glove, goat, gun, hair, hammer, hand, hat, head, heart, hook, horn, horse, hospital, house, island, jewel, kettle, key, knee, knife, knot, leaf, leg, library, line, lip, lock, map, match, monkey, moon, mouth, muscle, nail, neck, needle, nerve, net, nose, nut, office, orange, oven, parcel, pen, pencil, picture, pig, pin, pipe, plane, plate, plough, pocket, pot, potato, prison, pump, rail, rat, receipt, ring, rod, roof, root, sail, school, scissors, screw, seed, sheep, shelf, ship, shirt, shoe, skin, skirt, snake, sock, spade, sponge, spoon, spring, square, stamp, star, station, stem, stick, stocking, stomach, store, street, sun, table, tail, thread, throat, thumb, ticket, toe, tongue, tooth, town, train, tray, tree, trousers, umbrella, wall, watch, wheel, whip, whistle, window, wing, wire, worm.

Qualities - 100 descriptive words

able, acid, angry, automatic, beautiful, black, boiling, bright, broken, brown, cheap, chemical, chief, clean, clear, common, complex, conscious, cut, deep, dependent, early, elastic, electric, equal, fat, fertile, first, fixed, flat, free, frequent, full, general, good, great, grey, hanging, happy, hard, healthy, high, hollow, important, kind, like, living, long, male, married, material, medical, military, natural, necessary, new, normal, open, parallel, past, physical, political, poor, possible, present, private, probable, quick, quiet, ready, red, regular, responsible, right, round, same, second, separate, serious, sharp, smooth, sticky, stiff, straight, strong, sudden, sweet, tall, thick, tight, tired, true, violent, waiting, warm, wet, wide, wise, yellow, young.

Qualities - 50 opposites

awake, bad, bent, bitter, blue, certain, cold, complete, cruel, dark, dead, dear, delicate, different, dirty, dry, false, feeble, female, foolish, future, green, ill, last, late, left, loose, loud, low, mixed, narrow, old, opposite, public, rough, sad, safe, secret, short, shut, simple, slow, small, soft, solid, special, strange, thin, white, wrong.

References

- The 850 words as grouped and listed by C.K. Ogden in *The ABC of Basic English* (1932)