

"Nobody is better placed to explain how the control of language
can lead to the control of society."

— Dr. Philip Booth,
St. Mary's University, London



MY LIFE IN PROPAGANDA

LANGUAGE AND TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

MAGDA STROIŃSKA

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“Language is a guide to social reality.”
Edward Sapir (1929)



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I dedicate this book to my parents
who never lied to me
about important things
and to my children
so that they understand
where I come from.

Little girls

for Kasia

we were two little girls
then barely ten
just two little girls

the one with blond piggy tails
was you
and I
with brown braided hair

we grew up
in big pre-war apartments
left to our own devices
by the busy parents

we learned about sex
by deciphering medical books
written in *fraktur*
and translated them
with an old German dictionary

we played house
with one Barbie
and a few wooden dolls
one of them black

we did not have dolls that looked like boys...
so
instead of some happy families
we played JFK's and Martin Luther King's widows
the Barbie was Jackie

at an iron gate
we impersonated
Lenin in prison
flirting with Nadezdha

we tested each other
on difficult questions of history:
like who killed Polish officers in Katyń?
correct answers supported our friendship

and we were usually correct
as every night
we overheard our parents
listening to the white noise
known as the Voice of America
or Radio Free Europe

by grade four
we made plans to emigrate
and we did indeed, in our late twenties

who could have foreseen
where the turbulent waters
would wash us ashore?

we kept in touch
over the years
kept our friendship alive
only to reconnect
to write together
a book
on trauma

06/2018

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PREFACE

Which is to be Master?

*“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone,
“it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”*

*“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words
mean so many different things.”*

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master — that’s all.”

— Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass, Chapter 6

THE ABOVE POPULAR FRAGMENT of the conversation between Alice and Humpty Dumpty is often quoted in linguistics textbooks. It illustrates the complexities of the concept of meaning, the relationship between speakers’ intentions and hearers’ interpretations, or the dilemma of the interdependency between language, thought, and reality. Lewis Carroll made a number of interesting observations about language in his two volumes of Alice’s adventures, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, and some of his observations predate proper linguistic discoveries. The above conversation could be interpreted as pointing in the same direction as Ludwig Wittgenstein’s breakthrough observation that the meaning of a word is defined by its use.

The distortion of the meaning of words is the essence of propaganda. However, in an authoritarian system, the process of twisting the meanings of words is, of course, not called distortion. Neither is it usually called propaganda. Except for Lenin and Goebbels, who proudly used the term to refer to their methods of information dissemination, governments, parties and individual politicians usually

reserve the term ‘propaganda’ for the dishonest disinformation used by their opponents.

Instead, they choose to attest that what they themselves are doing when they distort the meanings of words is simply the process of defining the true significance of terms. If it is carried out without anyone noticing, this procedure can be very successful and may even be considered a natural process of language development. However, very little in the development of linguistic meaning is natural or accidental because language structure reflects mechanisms of human cognition and semantics reflects social reality.

It is here that the question “Which is to be master?” becomes important. In authoritarian regimes, the master or masters are easy to identify. They are the individual leaders or political parties who sociologist Stuart Hall labels as ‘primary definers,’ i.e., those who have the power to set the agenda and define or determine what is discussed in the public arena, and how. Hall observed that the news media “translate into a public idiom the statements and viewpoints of the primary definers” (Hall, 1978: 59). In authoritarian countries, the total control of the government over the media makes this process very easy. In democratic societies, primary definers include not only the government, but also business and academic communities, the cultural elite, or other sufficiently influential individuals or groups of individuals.

It is an important historical task to describe how totalitarian regimes of the 20th century used propaganda in order to influence the behaviour of masses, however, from an individual person’s point of view, an even more important objective is to find out how one can defend their inner freedoms and cognitive capacities in order to resist thought manipulation. In countries where propaganda is centrally planned and omnipresent, this means that one needs to understand how meanings are defined or redefined (manipulated and distorted) by primary definers and where deviations from truth or reality begin.

This means paying very close attention to the life of language and to the many separate lives of words. First and foremost, it means caution. A person who has experienced language manipulation, whether at a personal level, having been cheated or lied to

in a vicious way, or at a societal level, as was the case in communist countries, will never be able to trust words again. Suspicion becomes second nature. It is an instinct, a self defence mechanism. This defence, however, may ultimately be counterproductive in everyday life. Suspicion may in fact help the distorters of meaning, piggybacking off the initial skepticism and developing into a firm belief that you can't trust anyone. In turn, this lack of trust hinders solidarity and promotes isolation of an individual. I had the impression that this lack of mutual trust was quite widespread in many communist countries but was not so much the case in Poland where communism was clearly perceived as a foreign import. A better and more efficient method of self defence is simply developing a critical attitude to official discourse.

The idea for this book was born in London, in July 2001 after I gave a talk at the London Institute of Economic Affairs at the kind invitation of Philip Booth, who became its Editorial and Programme Director in the following year. My talk was met with a very encouraging reception. To my greater surprise, when I mentioned the topic to Marion Berghahn from Berghahn Books, she was enthusiastic about publishing the ideas as a book. Needless to say, I was enthusiastic too.

My desire to study and write about propaganda, something I commonly refer to as linguistic manipulation in totalitarian countries, was somewhat of a personal mission of mine. And yet, despite the encouragement from Marion, it took me a very long time to find a format that would allow me to combine my academic interests in sociolinguistics and my personal experience of a life with propaganda.

In the years that followed, a book that had originated as an academic research project began to morph into something more closely resembling an academic memoir. My own project began to approximate one of the diary assignments I give to my students: observe the effects of advertisements of beauty products on your image of self...; Observe how you derive your understanding of social reality from the language the media use...

As I wrote this book, I was further reminded of other linguistic or philological memoirs I had read and admired.

Among those, first and foremost was *Lingua Tertii Imperii* ('Language of the Third Reich') by Victor Klemperer (published in 1946, based on the author's war time diaries and subtitled "From the notebook of a philologist") and Michał Głowiński's comments on words (*Nowomowa po polsku* ('Newspeak in Polish') 1990; *Marcowe gadanie: komentarze do słów 1966-1971* ('March Chatter: Comments on Words 1966-1971') 1991; and *Peereliada: komentarze do słów 1976-1981* (Polish People's Republic's (PRL) Carnival: Comments on Words 1976-1981') 1993).

The language of propaganda is a complex phenomenon. Its study involves grammar, semantics and the lexicon, i.e., the *words*. The words are not all alike: different parts of speech play different roles in propaganda discourse. We may in fact revisit what Humpty Dumpty had to say about that:

They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot of them! (Carroll, Lewis, *Through the Looking Glass*, 1971, Chapter 6)

Verbs are indeed the proudest. They do not bend easily. This is why political slogans I remember were so often missing verbs or at least the inflected part of the predicate that would indicate the person, number, tense. Because of this vagueness, it was impossible to determine how to interpret slogans and therefore it was also usually impossible to say whether they were telling the truth. This strategy of verb omission, however, opens the door to many undesirable interpretations. One poster said *Naród z Partią—Partia z Narodem* (The Nation with the Party—the Party with the Nation) but it wasn't clear what they were doing together. My favourite example goes back to October Revolution posters and banners in Poland in the 1970s that read simply "Lenin in October." October was the month associated with the 1917 communist revolution and thus widely celebrated by Eastern European regimes. Some witty soul wrote underneath: "and cats in March"...

Yet, we do not need to look to communist times in order to find

multiple examples of such ill-defined (on purpose) slogans. A popular Canadian road sign posted by the provincial government read “Working together for a better Ontario.” Are we? Should we be? Who is or should be doing that? The government? The people? By leaving it to the audience to supply the missing verb and the intended subject, the authors of such slogans are making us their accomplices.

Verbs are also the proudest because it is difficult to break their so-called ‘valency’ requirements. Each verb naturally requires a certain number of necessary participants in order to form a complete utterance. The verb ‘to love’ naturally requires someone who is experiencing the feeling (the lover) and someone or something that is the object of that emotion. It is normally impossible to make the hearer forget or ignore the necessary participants in an action expressed by the verb. But politicians will try. When, in the 1970s, the Soviet Union broke off some arms reduction negotiations with the USA, Polish press used a rather convoluted construction: “Arms talks broken off at the fault of the USA.” But the question “By whom?” could still be asked. For sure, had they been broken off by the Americans, the papers would have emphasized it. If the papers did not say by whom, it could only mean that the talks were broken off by the Soviet side.

If the necessary element of the verb valency has been left unspecified, we naturally look for the best available candidate to fill the empty slot. The best candidates are those that are easily available in the immediate context. In mid 1970s, there was a big banner on the sand mine in the little town of Płociczno, near the Wigry Lake: “We will distribute as much as we produce.” Posted on the gate to the sand mine, it made it natural to think of distributing sand among Poles who were already feeling the consequences of the wrong economic management in the country and lacking most of the everyday products.

Those verbs that cannot have their meaning tampered with because their sense is too obvious and too well-defined can be replaced by other, more servile verbs. Thus, instead of ‘killing’ the enemy, our forces ‘eliminate’ and ‘neutralize’ him or her. Note that I said enemy, not enemies; singular form is important because there should be no suggestion whatsoever that there may be multiple

enemies. That would be distracting and suspicious. If many of them are against us, they may have a reason. Also, the masculine gender of the word ‘enemy’ in many languages is very handy. Killing or eliminating feminine enemies could make one feel uncomfortable. The main reason such substitutes are used for the verb ‘to kill’ is to stop the hearer from associating the object of the action with living beings. To kill means to take away life from some person or other living creature. ‘Eliminating’ does not pose that problem. We eliminate obstacles or unpleasant odours. This is why euphemisms, not just in the domain of verbs but for all parts of speech, are very widespread in political discourse, especially at the time of war. And again, this is not restricted to the totalitarian regimes of the past. We can see this mechanism being used today by democratic countries. It makes a linguist wonder whether the presence of certain linguistic processes may be indicative of some deeper change in society.

It seems to me that paying attention to language change is not just useful or possibly rewarding in terms of understanding societal developments. I believe language can indeed serve as the best barometer of current or future social trends. When words come into being, it means that new phenomena are either already in existence or are being created through the introduction of new lexical items. In totalitarian regimes, it has always been easier to invent words than to create new things or to change the living conditions of the population. When the party declares that the production of refrigerators has been further increased, it makes one think that it had been increased in the past (so it must now be quite substantial) and, at the very least, it makes one assume that some refrigerators are being produced. This is simply a result of the presupposition force of the above statement. It makes sense within our logic to assume so but it does not have to be the case. To produce refrigerators is more costly than to say that they are being produced. I remember a several-month-long queue in a store in a remote part of Warsaw where my husband and I finally bought our first refrigerator. One of us had to go there once a week to make sure we stayed on the ‘social queue list’ (or was it a list of the social queue? *lista społeczna kolejki* or *lista kolejki społecznej*). Linguistic construction of social reality—or social fiction—was a powerful tool in both communism and German Nazism.

I believe that watching language used by a group of people tells us more about that group than almost anything. We could call it 'diagnostic' linguistics but it may in fact be part of what is established now as forensic linguistics. It can be entertaining when one looks at some more or less innocent language manipulation in advertising, like the omnipresent slogan, 'new and improved' (if anything, it is either 'or', not 'and'). It can be terrifying, if one looks at the use of hate speech and ethnic, racial, or religious stereotyping that often serves as a prelude to a war. Regardless, it is worth paying attention to.

This book became more personal than originally planned. I started to write it for an academic publisher as an account of totalitarian language abuse, but very soon came to think about that abuse at a very personal level because it was, in many ways, an account of my own life with propaganda. I spent more than 25 years growing up in a communist country and the next 40 years watching from a distance as Eastern Europe was changing and how, despite political and social reforms, its fundamental problems persisted. The era of communism I experienced was no longer the time of violent persecution of those who opposed the system. To tell the truth, I grew up in an environment where I had the right to assume that no one really supported the communist ideology. Some people were simply conforming—to various degrees—to political requirements for some immediate or long-term benefits. There were no communist books in the library in my parents' home and no one has ever made me read one, not even in school or at the university. Do I even have a right to write about communism?

I practiced what George Orwell called 'doublespeak' at school in those classes where I thought it necessary to use language that distorted or obscured the truth, but I tried not to practice 'doublethink'. Mine was a pretty typical childhood and life in the late stages of Eastern European communism. Perhaps it is worth documenting the effect propaganda had on an ordinary human being? How it changed people even when they thought they transcended it. How it made one struggle with words in order to get to the bottom of things and to determine which is to be master. This book is an attempt to document one life with propaganda. Mine.

What began as a mostly historical and somewhat autobiographical undertaking on my part, suddenly took on a new life when—after a short period of optimism following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—new international and national conflicts and the surge of populism brought with them new variations of language manipulation. We know that every genocide starts with hate propaganda and dehumanization of social groups targeted as the enemy. It was clearly depicted by Gordon Allport (1954) as the pyramid of aggression. With the influence of the online communication and social media, everyone can spread disinformation. It seems to me that propaganda and thought manipulation have become some of the most important problems we face today: how do we know what is true and what is ‘fake news’. As I have been asking myself this question for most of my life; I hope that my own struggles with language and its representation or creation of reality may be of some help to others.

Woodstock, Ontario, November 2022

CHAPTER 1

My Life in Propaganda

THIS BOOK is an attempt to bridge my personal preoccupation with language manipulation and my academic interest in linguistic representations of culture and society. As such, it is too personal to be seen as an academic book and may at times seem too academic to be considered a personal narrative or a memoir.

My naive curiosity about the mysterious and sometimes puzzling relationship between reality and its representation in everyday language and in the arts belongs to my earliest childhood memories. One such distinct early memory relates to Polish and Soviet post-war films that I watched and enjoyed as a child; but they often left me somewhat puzzled. My attention was particularly attracted by the fact that these black and white movies (maybe they were black and white as I watched most of them on a black and white TV?) often depicted picturesque cities, including my native Warsaw. What I found confusing was that the pictures on the screen differed considerably from my day-to-day experiences. In the early sixties, which is as far back as my recollections go, Warsaw was grey, poor, and the signs of destruction from the war were still visible everywhere. There were still some ruins, or nearly ruins, in the city centre and numerous (re)construction sites. Many buildings had been somewhat patched up to make them suitable for living. I do remember new apartment blocks, like the one into which my half-brother Renek had moved with his family, with tiny apartments and fake

or minuscule balconies. I also remember the partly ruined or badly damaged but still-impressive prewar apartment buildings, like the one in Noakowskiego Street where my grandmother lived, with high ceilings, balconies with wrought iron railings and deep, well-like courtyards. The apartment building where I spent my childhood—built in the 1930s and never fully renovated until just a few years ago, more than 70 years after the end of the war—used to wear unhealed scars from fighting during WWII and destruction from the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

Nothing that I saw around me looked like the happy, bright, and sunny cities in the movies, with their modern and clean houses, wide and festive looking streets, and new and shiny street cars or buses. And yet, I still recall my deep conviction that what I saw on the screen was the proper reality, the one that must have really existed, albeit not in my immediate surroundings. At least it was the reality that should have existed. The world around me was, I thought, an impoverished reality—perhaps the same, but worn down by time and abuse. Even people in the movies looked different. They smiled showing white and healthy teeth, and they looked happy, unlike the grey and subdued crowd on real life streetcars or buses.

The feature movie I remember from my childhood better than any other—perhaps because I must have dragged my mother to see it more than two or three times—was a Soviet production for children, *Timur i jego drużyna* (*Timur and His Team*), based on a book by Arkady Gaidar. I first saw it at the annual International Children's Day celebration organized for kids at my mother's work place, the University of Agriculture (SGGW), where she was the deputy head librarian. Oh, how I wished to have a friend like Timur! He was handsome, full of mischief but also selfless, noble and even heroic in his efforts to help others. The action of that movie was set in a small town during a war—some men left for the front and the village boys were particularly concerned about helping anonymously those women whose husbands were fighting 'the enemy'.

What war was that? It seemed natural to me, at the age of six or seven, that the war in the movie must have been World War II and the enemy was the German army. For a small child in post-war Poland, that was *the* war. It was only relatively recently that a

conversation with Inga Dolinina, my Russian colleague at McMaster University, made me revisit those memories and find out more about my favourite childhood movie and the book it was based on.

The story of *Timur and His Team*, written in 1940 and using the name of Gaidar's son for the protagonist, is considered Gaidar's most lasting contribution to Soviet literature. The online biographical Encyclopaedia of Soviet Writers provides a detailed tale of Gaidar's life and literary work. Timur's story, it says, "was part of the curriculum in every Soviet school even up into the 1990s." According to Soviet sources, at the very beginning of what in Russia is called "the Great Patriotic War," Gaidar was commissioned to write another story, *Klyatva Timura (Timur's Vow)*, as a screenplay for a patriotic film. 'The Great Patriotic War' is a Soviet propaganda term used to describe the period immediately following German Operation Barbarossa, i.e., the German invasion of the Soviet Union, which commenced on June 22, 1941. Until then, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were allies. The only 'war' that the Soviet Union was fighting in 1940, when the book was written, i.e., before the beginning of the conflict with Hitler's Third Reich, was the occupation of the former Polish territories which started on September 17, 1939 and the invasion of Finland which started on November 30, 1939. Was my childhood hero Timur helping families of those who fought against Poland? Or was it Finland? Whichever one it was, it changed the whole story and profoundly reduced my admiration for the film.

Gaidar apparently wrote the new screenplay in 12 days (having been given 15) and, immediately after finishing his work, volunteered to join the Red Army in order to be sent to the front. His request was refused and he went to war as a correspondent for the paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. He was killed in a battle in Ukraine on October 26, 1941. Apparently, the detachment he was with was surrounded by Germans, but Gaidar refused to retreat and continued to fight. That, at least, is the official story. The online Encyclopaedia of Soviet Writers alleges that, in 1979, Soviet journalist Viktor Glushchenko discovered a woman, who claimed that Gaidar and another comrade had escaped the encirclement, spent the winter hiding out in her home, and left only in the spring of 1942. Nothing about that has been officially confirmed but the journalist

who publicized his discovery had been ‘actively discouraged’ by the Soviet authorities from pursuing it any further and he was ‘sensible’ enough to obey (for more details see the Gaidar entry). So, not only is the story itself somewhat suspect—my Russian friend maintains that the war in the book was just a generic war and, indeed, no details of *the enemy* are ever mentioned—but “the most celebrated children’s author in the Soviet Union” may have died not at the time and place specified by Soviet encyclopaedias either, although this may only be a conspiracy theory. I am not convinced that this conspiracy theory is true as Gaidar’s grandson, Egor Timurovich Gaidar, a Russian economist and pro-reform deputy Prime Minister in Boris Yeltsin’s government, would have likely mentioned the controversy in his memoirs (Gaidar 1999).

I was not aware of those double interpretations and ambiguities when I was in love with Timur, but I think it was that film that has marked the beginning of my life in the realm created by propaganda. My parents were visibly not impressed with my admiration for the socialist realist art. My other favourite childhood movie was Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp* (released in 1955) and I saw that one several times too. My childhood sense of beauty was strongly affected by this animated classic, and my sense of a romantic dinner was for ever set by the scene where Lady and Tramp share spaghetti and meatballs at an Italian restaurant. I am sure that my poor mother much preferred to watch *Lady and the Tramp* with me than *Timur*.

Even though Poland was definitely a poor country, I do not remember any significant economic hardship or even queues from my childhood. Of course, I had no comparison to any other reality. I have always had the feeling of plenty. Queues became part of my reality much later, around the age of eighteen. When I was little, shops were still relatively well supplied (for communist standards) and food was perhaps not sophisticated but plentiful. At Christmas, the family of my father’s first wife from Łętownia, a small village in the southeast corner of Poland used to send us parcels with walnuts, wheat, poppy seeds, and honey—all we needed to make our traditional (Eastern Polish and Ukrainian) Christmas food dish—*kutia*.

I do not recall my parents ever instructing me that what I would be taught at school may not always be true and that different things

may be said at school than what can be said at home. Somehow it was obvious, never questioned and never even seen as a problem. The world I grew up in was black and white, just like the news on TV only everything was “the other way around” than what TV or the papers were telling people. I understood in my childish way and simply took for granted that what was praised by the TV news announcer was not really good or not true and people who were portrayed as bad were actually good. I vividly recall my grandmother sitting on a chair close to the TV set, watching daily news and throwing invectives at the speaker. She was the only one in my family who, for some masochistic reasons, watched communist news on TV. She had to be close to the TV so that the volume could be set on low as no one else wanted to listen. She was repeatedly asking the same rhetorical question: “How can they be lying so blatantly?” (*Jak można tak kłamać w żywe oczy?*). She was particularly upset by the long speeches by Władysław Gomułka, the then 1st Secretary of the Communist Party. It was telling to find a very similar childhood account in the memoir by Vesna Goldsworthy (*Chernobyl Strawberries*, 2007) who too recalls her grandfather swearing at TV news. I remember my mother swearing at the TV in the year before she passed away, in 2006. Interestingly, I catch myself swearing when I watch today’s news from Poland. I watch news online now rather than on TV but my reaction is just the same.

I guess, the assumption that the news was propaganda (I probably called it *lies*, not propaganda then) was a given to me, even though I did not understand the reasons for its untruthfulness. This led to some amusing situations when I constructed my own conspiracy theories based on the conviction that there was a widespread persecution of the innocent by the authorities. When I heard my aunt Wanda asking my mother whether she had seen Kafka’s *Process*, I immediately assumed that it was some political process and was shocked to see posters for it with the logo of, I think, *Teatr Narodowy* (National Theatre) in Warsaw. A political process in a theatre! What will they do next?

However, the idea of a process in a theatre is not that unique. Mikhail Bulgakov uses it in his novel *Master and Margarita*. A more personal example was my husband’s uncle, Jerzy Kazimierski, who

was sentenced to death in 1945 for his participation in the Home Army's struggle after the end of WWII. His show trial was literally staged in a movie theatre in Łódź. The death sentence was later commuted to life, then 15 years of prison and he was released only after Stalin's death in 1953. At 22 years of age at the time of his trial, he was the youngest officer of the Home Army to be officially sentenced to death (many were killed without a trial). The note in the Warsaw daily newspaper *Życie Warszawy* (October 5, 1945) referred to him and those sentenced in the same trial as a "band of terrorists." The sentence was annulled and he was fully rehabilitated only in 1998. It seems my wacky conspiracy theories were not a complete nonsense.

I learned most about the recent history of my country from my family's history. I am sure that most Polish families could say the same. We used to visit family graves at two Warsaw cemeteries regularly when I was little and I actually enjoyed those outings, especially to the Powązki Cemetery which was full of old, moss-covered monuments and crumbling tombstones, many of them more than a hundred years old. We always visited the grave of Olga Zienkiewicz (maiden name Łozińska), my father's first mother-in-law and the symbolic grave of his first wife. "Died on July 7, 1941 in the USSR" it said on the tombstone. I knew that story by heart.

My father's family all came from the East. He was born in 1900 in Czortków (now Chortkiv, in Western Ukraine, east of Lviv), studied medicine at Lwów University and worked as deputy director of a public hospital in Czortków. He married a somewhat younger fellow doctor, Wanda Zienkiewicz, from a wealthy Lwów family, Polish but possibly with some Tatar or Armenian background. They had two sons. My father and his family moved to Warsaw in 1935 where my father started to work for the Social Security Institution.

In the summer of 1939, Dr. Wanda Zienkiewicz-Piotrowska, together with her two sons, Renek and Andrzej, then 8 and 7, was spending the summer visiting her parents in Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine) and enjoying her newly acquired summer holiday place in Rudniki, some 50 km south of the city. My father, a medical doctor, was in Poland, participating in military exercises as a reserve officer and expecting mobilization for the war seemed imminent. When

Germany declared the war against Poland on September 1, 1939, my two half-brothers and their mother did not return to Warsaw but decided to stay in Lwów with the grandparents, in Międzyńskiego Street. On September 17, Eastern Poland was invaded by the Soviet Union, according to the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement signed earlier in 1939. My father, recalled from reserve to active duty in the Polish Army, was captured by the Soviets and miraculously escaped their POW camp (and likely death) thanks to the help of his Jewish colleagues. Those brave men recognized my father and asked the Soviets for permission to call on him to consult on some serious medical problem of someone among the Soviet camp authorities. They gave my father civilian clothing and helped him escape from prison and flee. He went to Lwów, to his in-laws, not even knowing that his wife and sons were still there. I assume that many of those who were captured with my father were later found shot dead in mass graves of Katyń, Kharkov, or Miednoje.

Despite my father's efforts to bring his wife and the children back to Warsaw (he managed to return to Warsaw and sent her papers that would allow her to cross the border that divided Soviet occupied territory from the German occupied part of Poland), she decided to stay in Lwów. Maybe she did not want to leave her mother alone, after her father passed away in the winter of 1939. Sadly, she was deported on June 29, 1940 (third deportation), with the boys, to a small settlement of Panino, in Voronezh region of Russia. The journey on a crowded goods train took nine days. After months of hard physical labour, she was eventually allowed to work at the local field hospital—after all, she was a medical doctor, an ophthalmologist, the only physician for miles around. While this improved their living conditions for a while, she contracted typhoid and died on July 7, 1941, just a couple of weeks after Germany declared war against the Soviet Union.

My two half-brothers survived the war. Andrzej Piotrowski was evacuated with the Polish army formed in the USSR after Hitler attacked Stalin. He travelled with the army and the refugees from the Soviet camps to Scotland, via Persia. Renek Piotrowski stayed in the Soviet Union, adopted by a local Russian family who did not have children. This in itself is another sad story. Renek got Polio

while in the deportation camp. His mother used all connections she could to get him transported to a 'proper' hospital where he actually recovered and, after some time, was sent back to Panino. By then, however, his mother was dead and Andrzej had left Panino with the newly formed Polish army. Some good people took Renek into their home and took care of him until the end of the war.

I believe that my half-brothers' entire lives have been profoundly shaped by this childhood trauma. Renek, a scientist, rarely spoke about it. Andrzej, a humanist, often recalled memories from that time in his poems, as poetry allowed him a degree of freedom that would not be possible in another form of expression. An attempt to put those memories into a prose account was his first book, *Prośba o Annę (Asking for Anna)* (Piotrowski 1962) but even its subtitle, *a story in sixteen dreams*, seems a gesture of self-censorship. As if the author were saying: it is all fiction. I only saw it in my dreams. Only in 1999 was he able to publish in Poland a memoir of his exile, describing the deportation, life in the little village of Panino, the death of his beloved mother, and many other ordeals he and his brother endured (Czcibor-Piotrowski 1999). What, in my view, is astounding about this book is that it is a memoir of love and life, not hatred and death. Written from the perspective of the little boy he was then, Andrzej recalls the horrors of war as a background for his childhood and early youth: playing with other children, Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish, and Russian, his first love, and the overwhelming power and beauty of nature. There was no need for pathos or any form of value judgment. It would have sounded false in the mouth of a child narrator. Neither was it necessary to spell out the accusations. What could be good about a system that sends mothers with children into the wilderness, that orders a female eye doctor to work cutting trees, that lets her die away from her family, leaving her sons at the mercy of strangers in a foreign land? And yet, Andrzej simply recalls the beauty and wisdom of his mother and the goodness of other women who took care of him. This makes his message much more powerful than if he spoke of the evil of communism. From my own childhood, I particularly remember Andrzej's story of Polish orphans in Persia who were issued milk of magnesia by some British or American charitable organization and who immediately consumed it and were all sick afterwards. Andrzej

describes this in his second war-time memoir, *Cud w Esfachanie* (A Miracle in Isfahan')(Czycibor-Piotrowski 2001: 14).

The milk of magnesia story sounds a bit like the story reported by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn (1973) about Soviet prisoners who discovered the bodies of some prehistoric amphibians preserved in permafrost in Kolyma, in the far North of the Soviet Empire. I actually seem to remember a mention of that event (without any reference to prisoners, of course) in a children's magazine in Poland. The story was that the meat was so well preserved in ice that those present at the discovery of the animal carcasses immediately proceeded to grill their meat over a fire and consume it. The underlying horror of hunger can only be understood by those who know the context of both events. Who, in their right mind, would venture to eat millennia-old meat unless they were starving?

This part of my family history was non-existent in my school history textbooks. In communist Poland, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact agreement was as secret in the 1960s or 1970s as it was in 1939. Deportations of Poles to Siberia or Kazakhstan never happened; it was a mystery why my father's first wife died in the middle of nowhere. And it was Nazi Germans who killed Polish officers and buried them in the mass graves in Katyń, I was told in school. It didn't bother me at that time that I had to learn history in two versions—an official version for school purposes and the real one, for everywhere else. In Grade 3 or 4, I became friends with Kasia Michałowska, a girl from my class whose parents, also medical doctors, asked mine if the two of us could have private English lessons together. The responsibility for the Katyń massacre of Polish officers was her test to determine whether I was a suitable company for her. We were walking home from school, nine or ten years old, hopping from one stone post to another in a low fence along Niemcewicza Street, when Kasia suddenly asked me in an age-appropriate provocative manner: "So tell me, who killed Polish soldiers in Katyń?" "Russians," I said, surprised by the seriousness of her tone. She said okay and we became friends. I passed the test.

Experiences like that do leave traces in our personalities. They make you realize that there may be different versions of every story we are told. And they introduce you to the concepts—and practice—of

Orwellian ‘doublethink’ and ‘doublespeak’ at a very early age. When my own children were little in Canada, we had a rule that whatever toys or fast-food deals were advertised on Canadian or American TV were not really worth buying. It worked better than constant arguments. One time I gave in and bought a toy both children wanted because it looked great in a TV commercial. It broke down almost immediately and the rule was never challenged again.

Despite daily problems with reality and language when I was young, my first serious personal encounter with *doublespeak* occurred only after the communist government in Poland imposed martial law in December 1981. I was then working as a junior assistant in the German Department at Warsaw University. Two developments had a significant impact on my perception of the events between December 1981 and August 1984, when I left Poland.

The first one was related to my volunteer work for the Committee of Assistance for Political Prisoners and Their Families, opened at St. Marcin’s church in Piwna Street after December 13, 1981. I was introduced there by a friend, Piotr Świstak in the spring of 1982. I worked one or two afternoons a week in the Information Intake Section. We had a table and a few shoe boxes with used computer punch cards. On those cards, we recorded—by hand—information about arrests and other forms of harassment experienced by ordinary people. We asked friends and family of the people who had been arrested, when, where, what were the charges and where they were taken to. The card set kept growing and some names and incarceration places became familiar. Many people were coming to the Committee because they cherished the knowledge that someone kept records on the arrests and harassment they or their friends and loved ones experienced. This may have given them the reassurance that their suffering was not anonymous even if there were thousands of them and even if there was no mention of this in the media. One of my favourite visitors was the father of Solidarność activist from Wrocław, Władysław Frasyniuk. He was very jovial and loved to talk about his son. Once he mentioned that his son really wanted to have a harmonica. I asked around and got one from my cousin. I gave it to Mr. Frasyniuk Senior and hope it found its way to his son.

The Committee had broken the seal of silence that so often kept

the victims in isolation from the society and allowed the perpetrators to commit crimes without anyone knowing, thus giving them the impression of impunity. I believe this was possible because of the one and a half year of *Solidarność* movement which created a genuine feeling of solidarity among people. For me personally, the work at St. Marcin's was a lesson on how a civil society comes into being, how people become agents and no longer only objects of actions, how they resume responsibilities as citizens. But it also became a lesson on the importance of plain language.

I remember a middle-aged, well-dressed lady who came to report that her son had been arrested and her apartment searched by police, probably because of her son's involvement in some opposition activities. She seemed embarrassed by the situation, did not know, perhaps, how to behave and who we were. I thought this because she appeared to be using stiff, official discourse when reporting a rather personal experience. In particular, she kept using an official word for a house search (*przeszukanie*), the one that was used by no one but the authorities and the state-controlled media. Everyone else was using a well-established expression, one that has been around for generations, *rewizja*. For my generation, the word *rewizja* is immediately associated with the Nazi occupation and the often-deadly house searches by Gestapo. Some people probably also associate the word with the communist security authorities and their house searches for illegal materials, etc. There is no doubt in my mind that, when using the word *rewizja*, both the speaker and the hearer immediately, even if unconsciously assign the role of the villain to the person doing the house search and the role of an innocent victim, or even a hero to the one whose home is being invaded. The official word *przeszukanie* reassigns the roles, giving the right to perform the action to the nondescript authorities and taking away—or at least attempting to take away—negative connotations. By giving the authorities the right to conduct the search and by legitimizing the activity, the person whose house is being searched becomes an outlaw, a criminal. This may be the reason why the word never became part of non-official public discourse in post-war Poland where communist authorities, in particular police, continued to be assigned the role of the villain, performing illegal house

searches and harassing innocent people. *Przeszukanie* corresponds directly to the English ‘search’, except that in the political context of the communist Poland, a neutral expression for that common act of aggression against people’s privacy was out of place.

And yet, the well-dressed lady kept using the word *przeszukanie*. I had the impression that perhaps one of her son’s friends told her to report the arrest and that she was almost ashamed that she got herself into trouble with police. When she used that odd expression again, I could not stop myself from interrupting her: “You mean *rewizja*, don’t you?” With this word uttered aloud, she visibly relaxed, sighed, and said with immense relief: “Yes, I mean *rewizja*”. The use of the word *rewizja* transformed her from someone involved in an illegal (or even criminal, according to communist authorities) activity to an innocent victim. Those who invaded her apartment were put in their proper place as villains violating her rights. And, most importantly, her son was no longer a criminal but perhaps a hero. That one word must have brought an immense relief to the mother.

I saw that same lady several more times in Piwna Street during her son’s incarceration, then called *internment*. She made some friends with other parents of arrested students and workers; she learned the lingo of the martial law. I even overheard her instructing another woman, newly introduced to the world of arrests and prisons, about how to send money to her child, the so-called *wypiska*. If nothing else, I think she may have found a common language with her son. I do not remember her name, but I shall not forget the lesson she taught me.

As I was helping in Piwna Street—and I must add that it was a very minimal involvement on my part—I was approached by my former French teacher with a request that changed my academic interests once and, perhaps, forever. He knew that I was a graduate from linguistics and working in the German Department at Warsaw University. He once lent me a German book by Victor Klemperer with a cryptic title *LTI*. He said then that the book, whose full title was *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (Language of the Third Reich) was a must for any German philologist and should be read by everyone. Quite honestly, at that time, I just paged through it as I was too preoccupied with other things. But when my French teacher visited me

at home some time in mid-1982, he suggested that I translate that very book into Polish for an underground publishing house. A torrent of thoughts swept through my mind. My half-brother Andrzej, whom I considered a role model, was a literary translator. Literary translation was my dream occupation; I would do almost anything to get my foot in the door and gain experience. It was against martial law to publish books that were political in nature, so there was no point in asking what publishing house would publish the book and how much I would get paid, although, I think, a specific amount of money was named. I agreed without any hesitation. Nothing was signed and no names were exchanged, the teacher departed and I was left with the little East German paperback edition of *LTI* in my hand.

I started to work on my translation almost at once and was immediately struck by the similarity between Klemperer's experiences with the German language of the Third Reich and the situation I was observing daily when watching the news or reading papers. It was truly impossible to escape comparisons and not translate Nazi-branded expressions in German into the Polish communist newspeak. It was an overwhelming experience. I particularly liked to take the book with me to Piwna and work there. Except for days immediately following demonstrations or important anniversaries (there were lineups then as anniversaries usually triggered demonstrations and demonstrations resulted in waves of arrests), the office was quiet. Before the book, I used to chat with people at other tables or read but now, I had work to do.

In the spring of 1984, the translation was ready. I enlisted the professional assistance of a young historian, also from Warsaw University, who specialized in German and Jewish studies and who helped me with historical footnotes I thought the text required. I offered him money for his help, a portion of the honorarium I was to receive. However, when I finally managed to contact the person who allegedly represented the underground publishing house, I was told that the house went out of operation and that no one would print my translation since a state-owned press, *Wydawnictwo Literackie*, was about to release an 'official' translation, which, apparently, was kept under lock for a long time by

the censorship. This was truly devastating as it was my first attempt at literary translation. It also left me with a debt—I had promised money to my historian colleague (roughly equivalent to a two-month salary of a junior assistant lecturer) and was unable to pay him back. Despite this unresolved financial obligation, we became and remained friends. We both left Poland in the 1980s and ended up in Canada. Piotr Wróbel is now a Professor of Polish History at the University of Toronto. My translation of *LTI* was finally published by the Polish Publishing Fund in Toronto in 1992.

There was one more linguistic influence on my understanding of the Polish reality in the early 1980s: the sermons of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, a priest from a Warsaw parish in Żoliborz who attended to the striking workers in 1980 and who became a spiritual leader for the delegalized *Solidarność* trade union after the imposition of martial law in December 1981. His monthly masses “for the Fatherland” (no Nazi connotations in Polish) attracted huge crowds. I never managed to get inside the St. Stanisław Kostka church and stood outside, sometimes in the church yard, sometimes in one of the neighbouring streets. The voice of Father Popiełuszko, magnified by loudspeakers, was clearly audible outside. The atmosphere was remarkable, particularly when strangers were shaking hands with strangers following the words “let us offer each other the sign of peace.” Everybody in the crowd was aware that the next person could have been an undercover police agent and so the symbolic handshake always felt a bit like an attempt to convert the potential enemy.

What I remember best was the language of Father Popiełuszko, almost biblical in its simplicity and plainness. He preached tolerance and human goodness. He preached for truth when you were surrounded by lies. And he preached for the love of thy neighbour, even if that neighbour hated you and wanted to kill you.

In the summer of 1984, I left Poland and went to Scotland to do my PhD. In October 1984, Father Popiełuszko was kidnapped and murdered by Polish secret police. His murderers were identified and imprisoned but those who instructed them to carry out that action, i.e., their superiors, were never fully brought to justice. Today, all three convicted killers have left jail and the truth about this murder

still remains hidden. In the meantime, Father Popiełuszko has been beatified and even if he doesn't make it to sainthood, for me, he will remain the patron saint of plain language.

In August or September of 1989, I was chatting with a young German couple from Munich. We were in London, Ontario. Wolfgang was doing a post-doc in Canada and we met through a mutual friend, David Stanford, a colleague of my husband from Western University. We were all standing in the kitchen of Wolfgang's rented apartment, talking about politics. I repeated the words of Professor Jan Czochralski, my mentor in the German Department at Warsaw University. He said he was sure that communism would fall but was not optimistic enough to believe that it would happen in his lifetime. I said I had similar sentiments. And yet, the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, a mere two months or so later. The collapse of the communist system in most of Central and Eastern Europe gave rise to an unprecedented feeling of hope and optimism about the future of Europe and the world. The following unification of Germany and the democratic changes in politics and economy in many of the former communist bloc countries reshaped Europe. Many countries of the communist bloc are now members of NATO and the European Union. However, some of the reforms were rushed and no one had any expertise on how to implement change after decades of totalitarian rule. There had never been a successful transition from centrally planned to market economy before. The sudden change in political climate in Eastern Europe did not necessarily imply that the study of totalitarian frame of mind and its linguistic representations should be put aside as no longer relevant or relevant only for historical analyses. The communist perspective survived the end of the system because people living in Central and Eastern Europe still spoke the same language they used to speak before and it is the language that, covertly and in a clandestine way, sneaks old meanings and attitudes into new expressions. These old meanings are not just harmless antiquated concepts, but continue to serve as means of propaganda and mass deception. And a new hybrid mixture of old propaganda and a new, more Western-style language of politics emerged, different from the traditional 'newspeak', but equally confusing. We saw this in Russia and in the Balkans, but

also in the more democratic and reformed countries of Central and Eastern Europe such as Poland and Hungary. As a linguist, I am particularly disturbed by the spread of such confused language. As a Pole, I am deeply saddened by the return to demagoguery of communist-style rhetoric in my home country, by new divisions into ‘us’ and ‘them’ and by the simple rudeness of some political leaders and their disrespect for both the ‘unquestionable’ authorities and for their ordinary countrymen. Unfortunately, it is often the leaders who set the example. If they publicly display disrespect for basic values, it is no wonder many political opportunists will follow.

The most recent years have witnessed a surge in populism across the world. The European Union integration of new member states in Eastern Europe provides an interesting example of how national languages and traditions can be used in order to influence people’s attitudes towards the idea of European unity. New member states have a long history of aspirations to “return to Europe” after a period of forced isolation. In this context, it is puzzling that so much anti-European rhetoric is used in public discourse in Eastern Europe. It is a fascinating topic for linguistic research to analyse the corpus of contemporary public political debates in Eastern Europe as it demonstrates how language is used by populist parties, both the extreme left and the extreme right. Such parties are often initially regarded as marginal but are able to rapidly grow in popularity, just as the German Nazi Party NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party) once did. Both extremes use similar linguistic tools, reminiscent of communist and fascist propaganda, but adapted to the new political context of European integration. When I was working on my Polish translation of *LTI*, I was playing with the idea, originally suggested by Klemperer with regard to the emerging language of the German Democratic Republic, of writing about LQI (*Lingua Quarti Imperii*), Language of the Fourth Reich. In the Polish context, the word ‘Reich’ would have to be replaced by the word ‘Republic’. Interestingly, the populist government of the Kaczyński brothers in Poland (2005–2007) used to refer to the Poland they were trying to build as ‘the fourth Republic’. The language they used was often referred to as ‘the new newspeak’ because of its similarities to communist propaganda, based on conspiracy

theories, enemy figures and conflicts. When this party returned to power in 2015, these similarities only increased and the hate propaganda against various 'others' escalated. The need to analyse this new post-communist newspeak is a political necessity. This book is in part a reflection of that desire.

And then came the war in Ukraine, confirming my worst childhood fears. When I was telling people that the main reason I 'always', or for as long as I can remember, wanted to leave Poland was because it was too close to the Soviet Union, they likely thought that my fear was irrational and unwarranted. At least from the end of the Cold War, Russia was being seen as weakened, becoming westernized, less of a threat. I did not buy that. My greatest fear has always been the prospect of another war. My Mom used to say that there has not been a generation of Poles who did not go through a war but I was hoping that the martial law of 1981 had been my war. The fear of a Russian, and currently Belarusian, aggression has always been there.

The war against Ukraine will end, sooner or later. Its cost, both in terms of human lives lost and infrastructure (and here I mean not just factories and homes but also ancient monuments of culture) is already enormous. It shattered, for several generations to come, the dream of European peace and safety, already shaken by the Balkan wars and the annexation of Crimea. In this context, the question of language comes up again. Russia and Ukraine have very different narratives of unfolding events. The two sides cannot communicate as they disagree on their descriptions of reality. Russian propaganda dehumanizes Ukrainians, painting them as Nazis (an absurd but very effective invective for the Russian audience). This dehumanization is a necessary prerequisite for Russian soldiers to not feel remorse killing other Slavs. One day, when this war is over, Russia and Ukraine will still be neighbours. How will they be able to live next to each other after such atrocities?

Even before these troubling developments in the former communist countries, the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States gave birth to a new language and a new rhetoric in the West. While this theme goes far beyond the scope of this book, I could not help but constantly make comparisons between my own experience with the language in communist Poland and my research on

totalitarian propaganda on the one hand, and the language used to discuss politics in the shadow of terrorist threats on the other hand. The war in Iraq, the situation in Afghanistan, and the fear of a global conflict with Islamic fundamentalists brought a new language to the West. I feel horrified when I see the concept of ‘an enemy’ (usually in singular, of course) resurrected and the world divided again into those who are ‘with’ us and those who are ‘against’ us by virtue of not being ‘with’ us. I cringe when I hear about ‘freedom fries’ and when politicians are elected on little more than ‘gut feelings’.

This book took more time to write, and even longer to publish than I thought, precisely because of the uncomfortable connection between the growing power of propaganda in different parts of the world. I started writing it in the summer of 2001, just weeks before the attacks of September 11. Like everyone else, I watched with horror as the planes struck the World Trade Centre and hoped against any hope, each time these images appeared on the TV screen, that *this time* the plane would miraculously re-emerge from behind the building without hitting it. But I was wrong time and time again. It seemed that there were no words to describe what had happened. But then words started to emerge. First it was the ‘war on terrorism’, something understandable in the time of national anguish. And then terrorism became abbreviated to a rather vague and imprecise ‘terror’ and, day by day, I turned into a modern-day Victor Klemperer, mesmerized by the transformation of English used by the American media.

The war on terror has proven to be a long one and its end is still not in sight. Victor Klemperer once said about the language of the Third Reich:

... it changes the value of words and the frequency of their occurrence, it makes common property out of what was previously the preserve of an individual or a tiny group, it commandeers for the party that which was previously common property and in the process steeps words and groups of words and sentence structures with its poison. Making language the servant of its dreadful system, it procures it as

its most powerful, most public and most surreptitious means of advertising.

The task of making people aware of the poisonous nature of the LTI and warning them of its dangers is, I believe, not just schoolmasterish. (Klemperer 2000: 16)

I strongly believe this is true not just of LTI, Language of the Third Reich, but of any propaganda that relies on language manipulation. As long as it continues to take on new spins, the task of making people aware of its poisonous nature remains a meaningful occupation.

CHAPTER 2

The Confusion of Language

THERE ARE MANY WAYS in which language may be used to distort reality. We rarely ponder what happens when the language used in public domain fails to fit reality. Does this situation happen? Has it happened in the past? Can the misalignment of reality and language be noticed? What is it indicative of? What effects does it produce in the hearer? And, most importantly, how can ordinary people protect themselves from propaganda and language manipulation? Having grown up in a place where language became divorced from reality, I have often asked myself these questions.

Some of these issues concern fundamental problems in linguistics and philosophy of language. Others are more specific to sociology or media studies. The analysis of the role of language in politics is not a new area of research. The 20th century, with its rise and fall of totalitarian powers, provided a particularly rich source of data for the study of propaganda and language distortion. A number of scholars were engaged with the question of propaganda in the last century; here I shall focus primarily on their work published in the 1940s or early 1950s, even though from different theoretical perspectives and based on different experiences. This choice is simply related to the fact that those were the sources that were available to me when I was still in Poland and which affected my own thinking. As many of the observations seem to still apply today, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, I would argue that we are still dealing with

aspects of totalitarian minds and propaganda machines and should therefore remain alert to the dangers of deception through language.

The word that is usually used to refer to a purposeful distortion of reality for broadly understood political purposes is *propaganda*. In the West, the term has mostly negative connotations, which cling more closely to the noun than to the verb—to *propagate*. The word was originally used to designate *Propaganda Fide*, the Vatican Office for the Propagation of the Faith, established in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV in his Bull *Inscrutabili Divinae*. Today, this body, responsible for missionary activity throughout the world, is known as the *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*. This Congregation was renamed in 1982 by the Polish-born Pope John Paul II, and I wonder whether John Paul's experience with the communist use of the term 'propaganda' during his life in Poland had anything to do with that.

The word propaganda was later taken over by non-religious circles to describe a variety of ways in which human conscience, attitudes, and behaviour could be influenced by purposefully used linguistic and other means of persuasion. The clearly negative connotations of the term date back at least to World War I when the ultimate purpose of propaganda became the control of human societies. Horst Dressler-Andress, one of the collaborators of Joseph Goebbels who was responsible for the management of the radio network in the Third Reich, described the purpose of propaganda as ensuring "uniform reaction to events" (quoted after Mazur 2003: 20). In the Soviet Union, the word 'propaganda' was shortened and combined with the truncated noun 'agitation' to produce 'agitprop', a word that described vigorous ideological persuasion, both in political and in literary texts. In the 1950s, a new term came into circulation, coined by the American writer and journalist Edward Hunter: 'brain-washing'. Even though its scientific merits are still debatable, the term is used colloquially for any attempts to manipulate people's thoughts and behaviour.

I started to use the term propaganda for the type of information disseminated by the official media in Poland relatively late, probably only at the end of high school. Before that, the fact that the media (newspapers, radio, television, films, school textbooks, and

some—but not all teachers, etc.) lied was for me a kind of shameful family secret, like the fact that some relative drank too much because they could not control their urges. I did not understand why it was so but I knew there was nothing I could do to change it. Later, my thinking of language manipulation was particularly influenced by three writers, all of whom I read while still in Poland. I list them in the order in which I encountered them:

- George Orwell (1903-1950), British essayist and writer. His novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and later also his 1946 essay “Politics and the English Language” had a profound effect on my thinking of language and reality;
- Czesław Miłosz (1911- 2004), Polish poet and writer, 1980 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature and the author of *The Captive Mind* (1951), where he analyses the mechanisms of attraction that communism, which he calls The New Faith, exerts on intellectuals. This book has been described by *The New York Times Book Review* as “a central text in the modern effort to understand totalitarianism”; and
- Victor Klemperer (1881-1960), a German-Jewish philologist, author of several little-known books on French literature published during his lifetime, and his highly celebrated diaries published posthumously. He is also the author of a unique study on the language of the Third Reich, first published in 1947 under the title *LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii* and only relatively recently (2000) translated into English.

Even before I left Poland, I became interested in the idea of linguistic relativism, usually associated with two American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, but applied to the language manipulation in totalitarian regimes. I was introduced to their ideas while taking Theory of Translation class in my third year at the university. After I left Poland, I also read many other authors who dealt with totalitarian propaganda. Of those, the most significant influence on my views was Friedrich August Hayek (1899-1992), an economist and political scientist with a very clear understanding of the

communist system of centrally planned economy. I was introduced to Hayek's writings by Philip Booth of the Institute of Economic Affairs in London. I particularly value the insights I gained from Hayek's two books, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) and the much later book *The Fatal Conceit* (1988).

By naming these authors I by no means wish to minimize the impact that many other scholars and writers had on my understanding of the totalitarian language. Hannah Arendt, Mikhail Heller, Michał Głowiński, Jerzy Bralczyk, Kazimierz Orłoś, Alain Besançon—they all played a critical role in the development of my understanding of the communist system's impact on our thinking, speech, and behaviour.

In writing about totalitarian regimes and their language, it might be prudent to start by attempting a definition of totalitarianism. It is generally understood as a type of authoritarianism, where the group in power exerts complete and total control over every aspect of life and requires obedience and conformity from each and every individual. In order to exert this control, the ruling group needs to control the sources and the means of disseminating information (through censorship and media ownership), the behaviour of the subjects (through secret police and informers), and also the means of production and distribution of food and consumer goods (through centrally planned economy). Totalitarian systems may differ in many ways, and in fact, fascism, Nazism, and communism were very unlike in terms of class support, attitude to private ownership, racial, and national issues, etc. However, they were also similar because they had emerged from "the same seedbed of Romantic Idealism and were based on almost identical pseudo-scientific theories of history" (compare with P.D. Hutcheon's 1996 paper on Hannah Arendt's comparison of the two systems). Where Nazism considered *race* as the driving force of history and the principle of in-group membership, communism used the notion of 'class'. For Kazimierz Orłoś, Polish writer and essayist, what these different types of totalitarian regimes had in common and what distinguished them from other political systems that used manipulation was the fact that, in totalitarian countries, an open dissension from the official line was punishable, sometimes very severely. The two

systems—communism and Nazism—had enough in common to allow us to look at totalitarianism as a more general phenomenon and to focus on its attitude to language. It may be worth adding that in our technology-driven and technology-mediated Western world, control of the media may actually become a sufficient condition for the emergence of an almost totalitarian style of political rhetoric. Thus, these observations are not purely historical and oriented towards the past. Unfortunately, political manipulation through language is still very much in use in many parts of the world.

For an historian, it might be interesting to examine why the 20th century was a time of such an unprecedented spread of totalitarian ideology and was witness to equally unprecedented (in terms of scale and brutality) crimes against humanity in the name of a man-made ideology. Millions of people in many parts of the world perished in direct combat and in death camps, purges, and ethnic wars, as well as through forced migration and starvation. Many of those crimes happened because of the rule of terror—in Soviet Russia, in Nazi Germany, in communist China, or in Cambodia. One wonders whether some of these monstrous crimes could have been prevented, if people who committed them were not captivated and blinded by the confused ideologies of their leaders. It seems that one of the reasons why these confused ideologies were able to get their grip on ordinary people was because of the linguistic mastery of their propaganda experts. Thus, the 20th century could also be labelled the century of ideology and mass deception, or, to put it in a more straightforward way, ‘a century of lies and liars’ (compare with. W. Łysiak 1999). As such, this is a fascinating research area for a linguist.

Language is an indispensable tool for human communication and lying is but one aspect of human linguistic behaviour. Warnings against giving false witness are plentiful in our cultural tradition, but so are lies. The most unscrupulous propagandists, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, publicly—and probably rightly—maintained, that the more monstrous the lie, the easier it might be to make people believe it. And making people believe what the leaders wanted them to believe turned out to be probably

the most effective strategy of conquest and dominance. It produced obedience with minimal use of force.

This is one of the most startling features of totalitarian regimes: they are not satisfied with the rule of terror. As Joseph Goebbels (in a speech delivered at the 1934 Party Rally in Nuremberg and made famous by Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph des Willens*) put it: "It may be good to have power based on weapons. It is better and longer lasting, however, to win and hold the heart of a nation." These words may be easily dismissed as just another example of Nazi rhetoric, but I take them as an expression of a fundamental principle of political propaganda. If you can make people believe what you want them to believe, they will be willing to do what you tell them to do.

In the 1947 foreword to his 1932 utopian (or perhaps rather dystopian) novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley (1946/2007: xlvii) observed that

[a] really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude.

No guards will be necessary if the population disciplines themselves. Polish humour of the communist era captured this fact in a famous joke: Why is there no need for guards at the cauldron for Poles in hell? Because, should anyone try to escape, others would pull him back inside.

Thus, both Nazis and communists regularly appealed to emotions and instincts of *their people* in order to make sure that the official goals would be internalised by ordinary citizens. This was done not because the leaders yearned for genuine love of their people but because, as Hayek observed:

the most effective way of making everybody serve the single system of ends towards which the social plan is directed is to make everybody believe in those ends. To make a totalitarian system function

efficiently it is not enough that everybody should be forced to work for the same ends. It is essential that the people should come to regard them as their own ends. Although the beliefs must be chosen for the people and imposed upon them, they must become their beliefs, a generally accepted creed which makes the individuals as far as possible act spontaneously in the way the planner wants. If the feeling of oppression in totalitarian countries is in general much less acute than most people in liberal countries imagine, this is because the totalitarian governments succeed to a high degree in making people think as they want them to. (Hayek 1944: 114)

Authoritarian regimes of earlier epochs must have caused considerable suffering to their subjects but they did not require those subjects to believe that their suffering was for their own good and that the misery should make them happy and proud. If the subjects of the communist system or Nazi rule in Germany did not feel proud and happy, this was their own fault (they were ideologically not mature enough or perhaps they were even class enemies, hostile to the system) and this, of course, was a reason for further persecution. The communist system extended this principle of forced re-education and indoctrination to prisons and labour camps, requiring self-denunciations and confessions of guilt from people who were innocent of any crime. Sadly, often they did confess to crimes they did not commit. It is understandable that someone who faces death may cling to any chance of salvation. Many of those who confessed could have hoped that this would give them a chance to save their lives. Some were certainly tortured into submission. Streatfeild (2007) in his fascinating book *Brainwash: The Secret History of Mind Control*, says that “given enough pressure and fear, [...] everyone will break down eventually” (18).

The mystery of Soviet trial confessions in the 1930 attracted a lot of scientific attention (see also O. John Rogge’s 1959 *Why Men Confess*). Streatfeild reports William Sargant’s (1956) account of Pavlov’s experiments on conditioned reflexes in his book *Battle for*

the Mind. By sheer accident, Pavlov, a Russian psychologist and physician who won the 1904 Nobel Prize in Physiology, discovered that extreme trauma (fear of death) could reverse all learned behaviours and cause complete personality change (as a fear of drowning erased learned conditioned behaviours in his dogs when his lab was flooded). Subjected to such critical conditions as torture, people too may develop irrational behaviours and become extremely suggestible. They may actually embrace solutions they would never accept under normal conditions. According to Sargant, who also had experience working with WWII soldiers suffering what we call today post-traumatic stress disorders, this might explain why some people who confessed their non-existent guilt at Soviet trials looked radiant and were smiling in a strangely absent but happy way (Streatfeild 2007: 18).

Orwell masterfully captured this particular desire of the party to mould the human mind in *1984*:

We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us; so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him. It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought should exist anywhere in the world, however secret and powerless it may be. Even in the instance of death we cannot permit any deviation . . . we make the brain perfect before we blow it out (267).

The very final paragraph of *1984* beautifully portrays the reversed thinking of Winston's tortured mind, the transition from hate and fear to love and willing surrender, to acceptance:

He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother (311).

Totalitarianism further introduced a new quality into the area of mass deception by promoting persuasion by means of altering people's perception of reality. This total effect could not have been achieved without mobilising all possible means of (dis)information dissemination, which, in turn, became possible only through advances in technology (radio and film). Totalitarian propaganda was different from propaganda used in other political systems because all its instruments, means and techniques were controlled by one centre and served one goal. Hayek wrote:

If all the sources of current information are effectively under one single control, it is no longer a question of merely persuading the people of this or that. The skilful propagandist then has the power to mould their minds in any direction he chooses and even the most intelligent and independent people cannot entirely escape that influence if they are long isolated from all other sources of information. (Hayek 1944: 114)

Victor Klemperer, undoubtedly an intelligent and independently thinking man, added a confession based on his own experience of life in the Third Reich:

I [...] know that a part of every intellectual's soul belongs to the people, that all my awareness of being lied to, and my critical attentiveness, are of no

avail when it comes to it: at some point the printed lie will get the better of me when it attacks from all sides and is queried by fewer and fewer around me and finally by no one at all (Klemperer 2000: 223).

Those were truly prophetic words. Klemperer never gave in to Nazi propaganda. As a Jew, he was an object of persecution by the Nazi system and could not feel any attraction to ideology that denied him and his fellow Jewish Germans humanity. However, after the war ended, he joined the Communist Party and—at least for some time—truly believed the communists would save Germany. The fact that, immediately after the horrors of World War II, many intellectuals felt drawn to communist ideology requires a separate explanation. Maybe it is simply our unconscious defence mechanism that makes us reject the supposition that both sides are equally evil? Maybe it is our human desire to believe in something and to trust someone? Propaganda mercilessly exploits this weakness.

When all media tell the same story and no one dares to challenge the official version because of the fear of punishment, anything can be presented to people as truth. Just one year after coming to power, Goebbels was able to publicly declare:

There are no parliamentary parties in Germany any longer. How could we have overcome them had we not waged an educational campaign for years that persuaded people of their weaknesses, harms and disadvantages? Their final elimination was only the result of what the people had already realized. Our propaganda weakened these parties. Based on that, they could be eliminated by a legal act. Goebbels (1934)

It is not true that propaganda weakened parliamentary parties in Germany but it probably is true that propaganda weakened the intellectual immunity of the audience and its ability to distinguish between rhetoric and reality. Because it follows an agenda, propaganda, by definition, distorts the relationship between truth and reality; it blurs the notion of truth and tries to get away from it. In

effect, the notion of truth is redefined. Here is an example of such redefinition from Goebbels (ibid.):

Good propaganda does not need to lie, indeed it may not lie. It has no reason to fear the truth. It is a mistake to believe that people cannot take the truth. They can. It is only a matter of presenting the truth to people in a way that they will be able to understand.

This sentence
reworked.

These words, written years ago, may be helpful in understanding how it was possible that, in the era of modern and global communication, Slobodan Milošević could successfully persuade many Serbian people that he was *the guarantor of peace* in the Balkans or how, in Serbian media, he could claim victory over NATO forces. The Balkan conflict could serve as a modern example of total propaganda and mass deception with the required attributes of a total media control. Some would claim it was an example of total propaganda on both sides of the conflict.

Perhaps we should not stop here. Perhaps we should ask ourselves: what do we really know about the conflict in the former Yugoslavia or any other of the current conflicts in our global village. We are apparently being better informed about world events than ever before, with various opportunities to find the news in papers, on television, and online. However, are we not getting most or all of our information from one source only, even if it comes via different broadcasters and is written with stylistic variations by various journalists? Are we really justified in our belief that we know the truth or is what we know just the version of the events that someone wanted us to know? I do not intend this to be an attack on politicians: are we even certain that the interpreters are getting the message right? In the spring of 2001, in my conversation with Mr. Christopher Hill, then the U.S. Ambassador to Poland and participant in the Dayton Agreement, he stressed the significance of misunderstandings, resulting from all parties using words and phrases (e.g., ‘ethnic equality’ or ‘multiculturalism’) that may have and indeed do have different meanings in Poland or the former Yugoslavia than in the West.

If the regime wants its people to accept and internalise the official doctrine and behave in the expected, (i.e., obedient) way, those people have to be persuaded that the world is indeed as the official propaganda wants them to think it is. This means they have to be taught to see reality through the filter of ideology and not the way it appears to be. Of course, ideally, they should be unaware that this filter exists.

As a child I believed that socialist realist films showed reality. I was sad that my part of Warsaw was not as bright and clean as it looked on the screen, but grey and partly ruined. Although I never had the chance to be in the parts of the city that looked like those in the films, I naively assumed that what I saw on the screen was reality and that I lived in a degraded version. It did not take me long to realise my mistake, but the gap between media images and my everyday life in Poland persisted. By noticing the gap, I learned that the relationship between reality and the pseudo-reality created through language (both verbal and visual) was arbitrary. The pseudo-reality was a utopian goal to some, mostly the idealistic intellectuals, and it was simply a tool of deception to others. In his book *The Soviet Syndrome*, Alain Besançon writes that through all those years of the continuous construction of the paradise on Earth, the scientific utopia of the Soviet system “has not even begun to be born” and the communist ideology remains only “a ghost in search of a body... The construction of socialism amounted to the construction of fiction” (1976:93).

In practice, only few people can really be persuaded for any considerable length of time that black is white, but many will learn to say they see things in prescribed colours and they will call them by prescribed names. As long as they play their roles, the regime usually does not mind. It knows well, that playing this game (Orwell’s ‘doublethink’) will soon become second nature for those who engage in it and that simply by using prescribed language their perception of reality will likely be altered. Language provides us with means to label the world and by this, it takes an active part in shaping our perception by imposing those labels as cognitive categories. We use language not only to communicate with others but also to think and form judgments. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) said that the limits of his language defined the limits of his world. George Orwell (1946) added the observation that our language “becomes ugly and inaccurate because

our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts” (426).

Orwell masterfully developed the idea of controlling people’s perception of the world by means of language manipulation in his *1984*, where a new language, *Newspeak*, had been invented specifically for this purpose (for more on reality construction through language see Stroińska 2000).

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought—that is a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and so also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever. (Appendix: The principles of Newspeak: 312-313.)

Orwell’s idea of ‘newspeak’ was based on historical facts and not merely a literary invention. Actually, it was based on elements of two realities, that of the Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany. In *The Road to Serfdom*, Friedrich Hayek provides a very thorough analysis of the process of language manipulation through words. It might be interesting to add here that Orwell reviewed Hayek’s book at approximately the same time when he was working on his *1984*. Hayek writes:

The most effective way of making people accept the validity of the values they are to serve is to persuade them that they are really the same as those which they, or at least the best among them, have always held, but which were not properly understood or recognised before. The people are made to transfer their allegiance from the old gods to the new under the pretence that the new gods really are what their sound instinct had always told them but what before they had only dimly seen. And the most efficient technique to this end is to use the old words but change their meaning. Few traits of totalitarian regimes are at the same time so confusing to the superficial observer and yet so characteristic of the whole intellectual climate as the complete perversion of language, the change of meaning of the words by which the ideals of the new regimes are expressed. (Hayek 1944: 117)

Hayek's views could be supported by the living experience of propaganda in the Third Reich as described by Victor Klemperer. He took up a distich by Friedrich Schiller about "a cultivated language which writes and thinks for you" and observed that there is more to Schiller's verses than an aesthetic interpretation. He writes:

But language does not simply write and think for me, it also increasingly dictates my feelings and governs my entire spiritual being the more unquestioningly and unconsciously I abandon myself to it. (Klemperer 2000: 15)

Klemperer further supports Hayek's observation about the role of single words with twisted and distorted meaning in the process of thought manipulation. He asks "What was then the most powerful Hitlerian propaganda tool?" and then answers:

...[T]he most powerful influence was exerted neither by individual speeches nor by articles or flyers,

posters or flags; it was not achieved by things which one had to absorb by conscious thought or conscious emotions. Instead Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed on them in million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously. (ibid.)

Michał Głowiński (1990) analyzed more recent language and thought manipulation in Poland. He stressed that by either promoting or excluding certain words, the language can give or deny existence to persons, things, and phenomena. In the Soviet Union, books were rewritten and official pictures were repainted if they happened to refer to a person or event that became an object of disapproval. Among the famous examples of such manipulation of historical facts through their visual representation in art (not in photography, where making changes has been easier) are the alterations of Vladimir Serov's 1947 painting of Lenin proclaiming the establishment of the Soviet power. In the original version, Stalin can be seen standing behind Lenin. He was added to the picture in order to strengthen his claim that he was Lenin's legitimate successor. After Stalin's death, Serov painted a new version of his picture in which the figure of Stalin has been painted over and covered by a picture of another man. The original picture was a historical fabrication but most people would likely accept that Stalin and Lenin must have at least worked together. There is also a picture of Stalin by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bozhi called *Stalin in the Civil War*, painted around 1950. It portrays Stalin at the front line together with some other commander. The picture suggests that Stalin took a more active role in military operations in the civil war than he did in reality.

In Nazi Germany, a famous representation of Hitler in art was the portrait by Hubert Lanzinger, depicting the *Führer* in white medieval armour, on a black horse. Painted in the mid 1930s, it is entitled *The Standard Bearer*. This heroic representation would lose some of its appeal if the viewer were to know that Hitler was allegedly afraid of horses.

In 1995, London's Hayward Gallery had a thought-provoking exhibition entitled *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators, 1930-45*. It provided an opportunity to compare art from communist Russia, Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and communist China. All totalitarian countries of that period managed to produce or to legislate art that was in many ways so similar that, as Igor Golomstock notices in the introduction to his 1990 *Totalitarian Art*, "one could only recognize its country of origin by spotting whose portraits adored the walls." What made the art produced by these diverse systems so uniform was the fact that it was realist in form but utopian in content. It depicted reality that did not exist, but it depicted it so well that, just as I believed socialist-realist films and not my eyes, people believed art and not reality. Thus, communist and Nazi art documents the history of fiction.

Through the power of language, verbal or visual, the picture of reality in the minds of those who are subjected to the total propaganda machine can be distorted, and the difference between the given and desired state of affairs blurred (see Głowiński 1990: 8-9, Strońska 1994: 59 and 2000: 125). Victor Klemperer goes further and keeps asking about the outcome of such continued distortion:

And what happens if the cultivated language is made up of poisonous elements or has been made the bearer of poison? Words can be like tiny doses of arsenic: they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect, and then after a little time the toxic reaction sets in after all. If someone replaces the words 'heroic' and 'virtuous' with 'fanatical' for long enough, he will come to believe that a fanatic really is a virtuous hero, and that no one can be a hero without fanaticism. The Third Reich did not invent the words 'fanatical' and 'fanaticism', it just changed their value and used them more in one day than other epochs used them in years. (Klemperer 2000: 15-16)

Today we too use the word 'fanatic' with very high frequency, usually without realizing it. It has been conveniently abbreviated

to 'fan' and is being used, mostly by the younger generation and often with intensifying adjectives such as 'great', which indicates that people really do not realize the origin of the word. A 'fanatic' is an exaggerated devotee or an enthusiast going overboard in his or her passion and further intensification of such properties is superfluous. We may think that 'fan' became an innocent word and its overuse does not need to bother the purist. But the way we use language is a reflection of deeper sociological processes. The way the word is being used today signals that our strongest feelings (our fanaticism) is directed towards popular culture and celebrities. This may indicate that they have taken place of what used to stir stronger feelings in the past: religion, politics, etc. It is not my role to judge this development, but it may be worth pointing it out.

There is a famous saying attributed to Confucius, quoted by Hayek, that "when words lose their meaning, people will lose their liberty." In Eastern Europe, this poisoning of language went on practically uninterrupted for decades. Its effects have greatly contributed to the present state of mind of people in post-communist countries. Let us look at some examples to illustrate this phenomenon.

The country where I was born was called not Poland but the People's Republic of Poland. The word 'republic' (from Latin *res publica*) has an old polonized equivalent: *rzeczpospolita*. This is how Poles kept referring to their homeland for centuries: *res publica*, i.e., 'that which is the possession of the people.' However, the adjective *ludowa* (people's), used in many other combinations as well, was one of the Polish weasel words after World War II. The concept of weasel words was introduced into literature by Mario Pei in his 1978 book *Weasel Words: The Art of Saying What You Don't Mean*. There, he actually attributed the coining of the word to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1918, while Friedrich Hayek attributes the origin of the expression to Shakespeare's 'I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs' in *As you like it* (II, 5). In *The Fatal Conceit*, F.A. Hayek (1988) further analyses the phenomenon of weasel words, defining them as words that attach to other words and empty them of their meaning without leaving any visible traces of the operation. Thus, in the new name of Poland, what used to be the property of the people became the new colony of the Soviet Union. In

demokracja ludowa ('people's democracy'—the official name of the political system of the Eastern European countries) and in *sprawiedliwość ludowa* ('people's justice'), the adjective actually corrupts the meaning of the noun and turns the whole phrase into the negation of the noun. The adjective would be added, almost at random, to nouns in order to make them sound more 'politically correct' in the communist sense: thus, *gospodarka ludowa* would be 'people's economy', signifying something like socialist or centrally planned economy, but more vague and not at all equivalent of the German *Volkswirtschaft* ('economics' or 'national economy'). The word *ludowy* is legitimate when it is used to mean 'folklore-related', as in *sztuka ludowa* ('folk art'). It is a weasel word when it is supposed to relate nouns to the communist system.

A somewhat similar situation happened in German with the word *Volk*. For Hitler, all Germans, wherever they lived, constituted one ethnic group, one *Volk*. The lexeme *Volk*—in this meaning of ethnic togetherness—was added to nouns and adjectives quite freely producing many specifically Nazi words: *volksnah* ('ethnically close,' 'popular'), *völkisch* (a word practically taken over by the Nazis which used to mean 'popular,' 'populist' or 'common' but in a positive 'natural' sense), *Volksgemeinschaft* ('a racially unified and idealized community of people'), etc. One German word with *Volk* that survived the Hitler regime and is doing well, skilfully escaping murky associations from the past is *Volkswagen*, Hitler's pet project of the 'people's car'. To fully grasp the effects of adding *Volk* to other nouns and adjectives one needs to understand how the Nazi regime (re)defined the word *Volk* (see the brochure *Faith and Action*. Stellrecht 1943):

A People (*Volk*): A people grows from god's will. Woe to him who wishes to destroy the peoples and make people alike. God created the trees, the bushes, the weeds and the grass not so that they could merge into one species, but that each should exist in its own way. Just as a tree, a people grows as a living whole from similar roots, but becoming one, the strongest of its kind. All of the same blood belong to it. A people knows no state boundaries. It is bound by the ties

of blood that bind all the sons of a single mother. The German people is a nation of a hundred million. Each German belongs to it, no matter where he may live. A people cannot be destroyed as long as its roots draw on the strength of the earth. Summer and winter may come and go. But it always blooms anew in indestructible life and perfects itself in the strength that rises from its roots towards god's will. What does it mean when an individual dies? It is as if the wind blows leaves from a tree. New ones grow eternally every spring. The peoples are the greatest and most noble creation of god on this earth. There is no institution in the world, no party and no church, that has the right to make them the same or to rob them of even the tiniest bit of their individuality. (Stellrecht 1943)

This definition is quite convoluted because of its highly metaphorical form. It is very difficult to discuss the truth—or even determine the meaning—of statements that are expressed as metaphors. This new definition applies to the German people but it does not seem to apply in the same way to other ethnic groups. Thus, it is not clear whether, in the opinion of the authors of the brochure, the Jews too are a *Volk*. If they were, they too would have to be considered “the greatest and most noble creation of god on this earth.” Evidently, one should not search for logic in propaganda materials.

In Polish, the noun *brat* (‘brother’) and the derived adjectives *braterski* and *bratni*, became another contaminated word. In public discourse it no longer signified a kinship relation or shared interests, values and priorities (as is normally the case within families) but was related, just like the concept of *big brother* in Orwell, to someone who is wiser, more experienced, and who can command you. This notion should also imply that the big brother will protect you from the bullies, but exactly the opposite was the case in the communist bloc. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by Warsaw Pact troops was officially referred to as “brotherly help”, clearly defining the notion as violation of the rights of the people in Czechoslovakia

to decide for themselves. They were made into little kids who had to be brought back to order by the caring *big brother* who knew better what was good for them.

For over two centuries, starting with the partitions of Poland at the end of the 18th century, waves of foreign repressions triggered military uprisings, which triggered waves of emigration, first mostly to France, Great Britain, and the U.S., then also to many other countries of the world. There are several million Poles living outside Polish borders today. Among them were Poles who left before World War II, Poles displaced during the war, Poles who left when the communists moved in, Poles who left after each series of ‘events’, and, of course, Poles who are still trying to find better career opportunities abroad. It would be hard to find many families in Poland who would not have relatives living in other countries. They could be described as “Polish (political and economic) emigration”, “Polish diaspora” or “Poles living in exile”. These terms imply that those people have left Poland and are not willing to come back. They imply that Poland was or is not a country where they wanted to be or where they could return because of the threat of persecution. However, Polish has also a special term for Poles abroad, it is *Polonia*. This Latin name for the country denotes in contemporary Polish those Poles who live outside Polish borders, but speak Polish and continue to take interest in Polish affairs and culture. It is a ‘positive’ definition and it makes the members of the *Polonia* part of the greater community of all Poles. Outside Poland, the term *Polonia* does not have any ties to propaganda. In Canada and the U.S., we have the Congress of Canadian *Polonia* and the Congress of American *Polonia* respectively, as the highest level of representation of Polish interests in those countries. However, in communist Poland, the word has been taken over by propaganda. This difference in meaning and connotations is particularly visible for the adjectives *polonijny* (*Polonia*-related) and *emigracyjny* (*emigration*-related), especially when applied to ‘organizations.’ The first ones sent parcels to relatives in Poland, supported the teaching of Polish language and literature, and engaged in folklore dancing; the others supported imperialistic broadcasting such as Voice of America or Radio Free Europe and printed banned books to smuggle them into Poland.

In the 19th century Poland, patriotism was considered one of the top virtues. The Polish fatherland (*patria*) was divided among three foreign powers and working for the survival of the Polish language, culture, education, religion, and traditions were a high priority. The connection between patriotism and religion (with Virgin Mary proclaimed the Queen of Poland by King Jan Kazimierz in 1656) created a very specific brand of Polish nationalism. Nationalism does not have to imply a negative or hostile attitude to other countries, but it usually entails emphasis on ethnic unity of a nation while patriotism was free of any such narrow-mindedness. In communist Poland, the word 'patriotism' became linked with the support for the communist, Soviet imposed rule. 'True' patriots (with 'true,' in Polish *prawdziwy*, being another weasel word that corrupts the meaning of the words it attaches to) were those people who 'understood the historical necessities' and 'chose the right side in the struggle for social progress' (or whatever else, I am clearly improvising in newspeak here). Thus, a *patriot* was no longer someone who loved Poland (their *patria*), but rather someone who loved or at least willingly accepted Soviet domination of their fatherland. So redefined, 'patriotism' was no longer seen by Poles as virtue when applied to communist contexts. Privately, the word would still be used for contexts such as Warsaw Uprising or the struggle of the underground Home Army during World War II, but in other situations, it simply became one of those dull, empty words that were part of the communist newspeak. In some combinations, as in 'priests' patriots' (*księża patrioci*) it clearly indicated collaboration with the authorities.

More recently, the word *patriotism* seemed to have shaken off the layers of newspeak and could again be used to talk about the workers strikes in August 1980 or people such as Father Popiełuszko. However, soon after the final collapse of the system in 1989, the word was again appropriated by the chauvinistic faction of the post-communist elite, associated with groups such as the All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*), a militant youth organization sponsored by League of Polish Families (LPR, part of the ruling coalition in Poland between 2005 and 2007). They talked about patriotism, but their definition of patriotism was based on opposition to European Union integration and abhorrence towards

Western (liberal) values, the destructive influence of the English language and Western disrespect for Christian religious traditions. As always, there is an element of truth in that portrayal of post-communist Poland but fighting the spread of pornography or not mixing in English words where Polish terms are available is not equivalent with patriotism. This mix of militaristic nationalism, religious zeal, chauvinistic and xenophobic loathing of anything foreign with an added touch of anti-Semitism is just too much of everything. Even though I never supported communism and I have no problem with putting communist leaders of the past on trial, I would be most definitely opposed to lynching anyone and so the picture of a noose or slogans about hanging communists on trees or street lamps make me immediately reject anyone who would advance such suggestions. Janusz A. Majcherek (2008) observes in an op-ed in *Gazeta Wyborcza* that, as a result of the communist devaluation of the term ‘patriotic’, the anti-communist movement in Poland preferred to call itself ‘democratic opposition.’ In the same text, Majcherek also notes another word that became a very popular addition to all kinds of official names in Poland: *national*. A popular communist slogan of the 1970s was “The Party with the Nation, the Nation with the Party” (*Partia z Narodem, Naród z Partią*). The missing predicate allows for any and every interpretation. The official name of the military junta that declared martial law in Poland in December 1981 was Military Council of National Salvation. What exactly was meant here by the word ‘nation’ is not entirely clear.

Even though I made a choice not to extend my observations past 2010, I feel compelled to say that the 2nd PiS (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, ‘Law and Justice’) government brought a final devaluation of all these terms. By supporting and encouraging the right wing nationalistic extreme movement and their hate-based discourse, the authorities democratically elected in 2015 and loyally supported by approximately 30 percent of Poles, took Poland back to rather dark times of intolerance for disagreement, choosing party loyalty over competence, fundamentalist interpretation of religion, and disrespect for anyone different than the projected ideal of a Polish patriot: white, Catholic supporter of PiS, against EU, abortion, or admitting immigrants. One fascinating story about the 2nd PiS rule has been

the conversion of one of the men negatively associated with the first government of that party. Mr. Roman Giertych, a lawyer, who was the leader of the League of Polish Families, and part of the PiS coalition government (associated with the All-Polish Youth and the Minister of Education who wanted to teach patriotism in schools), made a 180 degree turn and became a very vocal critic of the party. While I was very critical of him in 2005-2007, I must admit that I enjoy reading his witty and intelligent texts now. The conversion of Mr. Giertych shows why PiS supports blind loyalty over intelligence.

The American *war on terror* after 9/11 also brought with it a lot of linguistic twists and turns, best described by George Lakoff, Professor of Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, in his March 18, 2003 essay “Metaphor and War, Again,” made available on the internet. This date, March 18, 2003, is important. The war in Iraq, the so-called *operation Iraqi Freedom*, began two days later, on March 20. The essay was meant as a continuation (or Part II) of the paper Lakoff wrote in December 1990, during the first Gulf War. That essay was entitled: “Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf”. That first paper began with the words: “Metaphors can kill” (Lakoff 1991).

Lakoff states that the public discourse used by the U.S. government in discussing the decision “whether to go to war in the gulf was a panorama of metaphor.” In 2003, he argues that “[m]any of those metaphorical ideas are back, but within a very different and more dangerous context” (Lakoff 2003). Lakoff argues that the war in Iraq has been successfully presented to the American audience as a *just war* because of the way different participants have been portrayed and framed. It starts with personification of nations (e.g. equating Iraq with Saddam Hussein, and Saddam Hussein with Al Qaida, and thus removing civilian Iraqis from the role of the Villain in this picture) and continues with imposing a story on the facts: The war was framed as a self defence of the Victim (average Iraqis who suffered under Saddam Hussein’s regime and the neighbouring countries threatened by Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction) against the Villain (Hussein himself) by the Hero (the U.S. troops). The weapons of mass destruction have never been found, and there is no evidence of any link between Al Qaida and Iraq, but these are

irrelevant details for the story. As Terry Arthur says in his book on political discourse, “for dodgy arguments, attack is the best form of defense.” (Arthur 2007: 89).

Lakoff concludes by explaining the importance of understanding the power of metaphors and frames over our thinking:

One of the fundamental findings of cognitive science is that people think in terms of frames and metaphors—conceptual structures like those we have been describing. The frames are in the synapses of our brains—physically present in the form of neural circuitry. When the facts don’t fit the frames, the frames are kept and the facts ignored. It is a common folk theory of progressives that, “The facts will set you free!” If only you can get all the facts out there in the public eye, then every rational person will reach the right conclusion. It is a vain hope. Human brains just don’t work that way. Framing matters. Frames once entrenched are hard to dispel (Lakoff 2003).

Lakoff was aware that one linguistic paper may not be able to stop a war but this should not deter linguists from analyzing the power of language and from trying to pass their understanding of what he calls “the cognitive dimensions of politics” to others,

especially when most of our conceptual framing is unconscious and we may not be aware of our own metaphorical thought. [...] [T]hat analytic act is a political act: Awareness matters. Being able to articulate what is going on can change what is going on—at least in the long run (ibid.)

Language is an indispensable instrument of communication but it can be a dangerous tool. Confused language is particularly dangerous because it poses as a toy gun while it is in fact a loaded weapon. It needs to be handled with care. Learning how to disarm propaganda rhetoric is one such way.



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