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**Katarzyna KOPCZYK**

University of Rzeszów  
katarzyna.kopczyk.94@gmail.com

## **POLITICALLY INDUCED METONYMY IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR***

**Abstract:** The following article attempts to analyse the phenomenon of conceptual metonymy occurring in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The analysis involves only a few examples of metonymy related to the conceptual domain of POLITICS. The article postulates that politics, in general, evokes negative associations. Thus, one of the objectives is to verify whether in majority of examples, political activity connotes adverse and unfavourable feelings. Moreover some concepts being part of metonymy have been evaluated according to the way in which they are perceived by English speakers. The article comprises two parts. The theoretical part contains a brief outline of Cognitive Linguistics and metonymy, as well as a short description of political reality in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which is essential to understand the context of analysed linguistic expressions. The second part involves the analysis proper of the material gathered. Four metonymies describing relations between people and the world in which they live have been formulated and examined.

**Key words:** cognitive linguistics, conceptual metonymy, Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, politics

### **Introduction**

Beyond doubt, politics constitutes an attractive testing ground for linguistic theories. Being present in almost every aspect of human life, it has been constantly studied and approached by various sciences and from different perspectives. Thus, it should come as no surprise that politics is also one of the fields examined by linguistics.

In fact, political theory and *the scientific study of language* (Lyons 1995:1) have been influencing one another since antiquity, when their beginnings are usually placed. This relationship was noticed by, among others, Ancient Greeks

who created “rhetoric”, defined as *the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing*<sup>1</sup> or, more recently, George Orwell and his “Newspeak”<sup>2</sup> in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Metonymies analysed in the following article have been formulated on the basis of George Orwell’s novel. They refer purely and simply to the political reality presented in the book, though one may connote them with some types of the totalitarian regimes.

## Cognitive Linguistics

As a separate branch of language studies, Cognitive Linguistics emerged in the 1970s, and soon became termed as one of the most innovative approaches to language studies (Evans and Green 2006:5). One may claim that it developed from Noam Chomsky’s Generative Linguistics, mainly because of disappointment concerned with its formality, focus on syntax and almost total ignorance of meaning (Grygiel and Kleparski 2007:46). Given that Cognitive Linguistics examines the relations between language, mind and sociophysical experience, it undergoes many influences from other scientific fields – such as philosophy, psychology or neuroscience.

One can enumerate multitudinous theories within the frame of Cognitive Linguistics, moreover they can be classified into several sub-branches (Evans 2012:130). However, two of them are of greatest importance. The first one – *cognitive approaches to grammar* – focuses on the structure of language and its organization, comprising among others Construction Grammar. The second sub-branch, referred to as *cognitive semantics* regards language as a tool for studying aspects of human mind, for example knowledge representation and meaning construction. Some scholars distinguish also another sub-branch, that is *cognitive lexical semantics* which encompasses word meanings and the following theories: the Principled Polysemy Model and Diachronic Prototype Semantics (Evans 2012:130).

Generally speaking, Cognitive Linguistics is based on two primary commitments: Cognitive and Generalization Commitment. Taking the first one into account, it relates to other cognitive sciences and characterizes language in accordance with the available information about the mind. Therefore, language should reflect what is already known about the human brain. As formulated by Evans (2012:130): *it is a commitment that makes Cognitive Linguistics cognitive*. Generalization Commitment, on the other hand, is much broader – it attempts to characterize general principles applying to all aspects of language. There is no

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<sup>1</sup> According to Oxford Dictionaries: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/rhetoric>

<sup>2</sup> According to Oxford Dictionaries: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/newspeak>

distinct division between the areas of linguistics, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, etc. Instead, Cognitive Linguistics examines the relationships that emerge between different aspects of linguistic knowledge and human cognition.

On the basis of the already discussed commitments of Cognitive Linguistics, it is possible to formulate a set of guiding assumptions (Evans: 2012:131):

1. the thesis of embodied cognition,
2. the thesis of encyclopedic semantics,
3. the symbolic thesis,
4. the thesis that meaning is conceptualization,
5. the usage-based thesis.

The first assumption emphasizes the communicative function of human speech and draws attention to the inseparability of language and body – they have to be studied together, or with respect to each other (Evans and Green 2006:44). Thus, one can claim that human experience is embodied –and cognition is embodied as well. To put it simpler – people think and talk about things deriving from their embodied experience (Evans and Green 2006:46).

As far as another postulate, the Encyclopedic Semantics Thesis is concerned, this assumption examines the semantic structure or, in other words, meaning representations in linguistic system. It is believed to interface with the conceptual system, usually defined as a network of knowledge organized in structures. Encyclopedic Semantics Theory can be illustrated with the example of the lexical item *red*, whose interpretation is based on the context and personal knowledge or experience (Evans 2012:132):

- (1) The school teacher scrawled in red ink all over the pupil's exercise book.
- (2) The red squirrel is almost extinct in the British Isles.

As one may easily notice, in sentence (1), the lexical item *red* is immediately associated with vivid and bright hue, while in the latter example (2) it is visualized by the reader as darker, possibly brownish. The obvious conclusion is that not only linguistic, but also conceptual or empirical knowledge is necessary to correctly interpret the meaning of a particular lexical item.

Another important assumption underlying Cognitive Linguistics is the Symbolic Thesis. According to it, every piece of grammar is a symbolic unit, comprising two parts: form and its semantic representation (meaning), linked together by a symbolic correspondence. Although this idea alludes to the basis of American Structuralism, it gives much emphasis to meaning – it is impossible to study the form without reference to its sense. Consequently, there should not be

separate studies of semantics and syntax. Grammar of the language encompasses the whole range of units composing it.

Regarding the fourth assumption, that is the thesis that Meaning is Conceptualization, two ways of studying meaning have been developed within the Cognitive Linguistics approach. The first type refers to non-linguistic mechanism, known as backstage cognition (Evans 2012:134). According to Fauconnier (1999:96), it involves among others: viewpoints, reference points, mappings, prototypes, metonymies, metaphors. It comprises the Mental Spaces Theory – according to which mental spaces are created during human thinking and speaking – and Conceptual Blending Theory operating on mental spaces so as to produce new meaning aspects. The second approach is The Theory of Lexical Concepts and Cognitive Models (LCCM Theory). It examines the role performed by linguistic cues and processes in lexical concepts and the way in which they facilitate the access to cognitive models.

Finally, the last assumption in question is the Usage-Based Thesis. It holds that *knowledge of language is knowledge of how language is used* (Evans 2012:135), because one emerges from the other – there is no distinction between possessing and using the knowledge of language. This assumption is in opposition to Chomsky's idea that linguistic environment seems to be impoverished because one can, for instance, enumerate plenty of cues used for language learning by both children and adults. Additionally, also domain-general learning mechanisms stand in contrast to the assumptions of Transformational Grammar. Yet another important point relates to symbolic units. Providing that they are arranged as a network, some of them present a schema-instance relation held between schematic and specific symbolic units.

To conclude, it would seem that Cognitive Linguistics is the most recent, interdisciplinary and the fastest developing approach to language. With its innovative view on the relationship between mind, language and experience, it creates many opportunities for studying these fields from different perspectives than preceding approaches (Ungerer and Schmid 1996:280).

### **The Basics of Metonymy**

Together with the appearance of Cognitive Linguistics, a considerable amount of attention was given to metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon while metonymy seemed to be ignored. Nevertheless, it did not take long for linguists to confirm that the so called *conceptual metonymy* is as relevant for the language and language use as metaphor. Another point worth mentioning, as postulated by Steen, is the motivation of conceptual metaphor by metonymy. It is visible on the example of one of the most widely-known instances of conceptual metaphor, namely – UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING. Given that the action of seeing is a

requisite for understanding, conceptual metaphor might be reduced to conceptual metonymy (2005:3).

Although many scholars have studied metonymy from various perspectives, special attention should be dedicated to Lakoff and Johnson and their remarkable book *Metaphors We Live By*, in which they establish a kind of landmark theory of Cognitive Linguistics, that is the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor and Metonymy. According to the authors, metonymy is the use of *one thing to refer to another that is related to it* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 35). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the name of a concept is replaced with a different one, still closely associated with the former idea. They distinguish a somehow special kind of metonymy, called synecdoche – which is a relation PART FOR THE WHOLE.<sup>3</sup>

Some linguists regard metonymy as a type of metaphor; nevertheless, one can notice certain differences between both mechanisms. Kopecka points out three essential distinctions. Firstly, metaphor involves mapping between two domains, whereas metonymy – within only one. Secondly, both mechanisms serve different purposes: metaphor provides understanding while metonymy is used as a reference. Finally, metaphor shows relation characterised as: *X is a kind of Y*, and metonymy – *X stands for Y* (2011:48). Furthermore, according to Steen, metonymy and metaphor can be differentiated by means of two notions – contiguity and similarity (2005:4). As far as metonymy is concerned, one term (the vehicle) is used instead of another (the target), but still it is closely associated with the first one, in other words – both terms are proximate. Metaphor, on the other hand, emphasises the existence of resemblance between two things or entities.

As Lakoff and Johnson claim, metonymies, like conceptual metaphors are systematic (1980:38). They distinguish the following examples of metonymic relations:

THE PART FOR THE WHOLE;  
PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT;  
OBJECT USED FOR USER;  
CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED;  
INSTITUTION FOR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE;  
THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION;  
THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT.

By means of metonymy, one can *focus more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:37). To put it another way,

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<sup>3</sup> As in: *We need a couple of strong bodies for our team*, in which the part *strong bodies* stands for strong people (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 36)

metonymy draws attention to some features which are characteristic for a particular person or thing and hides those of small importance.

Metonymy, much like conceptual metaphor, is frequently associated with figurative or literary language, though one should be aware that it is the subject of linguistic analysis as well. Being used in many various contexts and situations, it is a curious phenomenon to be investigated.

### **Political Reality of *Nineteen Eighty-Four***

As Orwell's last and most ambitious piece of literature, the novel was published in 1949. Woodcock (1968:61) claims that the author wrote the book so as to purge himself of a traumatic experience related to the Spanish Civil War, in which he actively participated.

The world in the novel is divided into three states: Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia. The story takes place in Oceania – comprising of, among others, North America and Great Britain. All the powers are in a state of never-ending war whose only real and genuine aim is to cause shortage of goods in order to maintain poor living conditions for the majority of people.

As far as the society is concerned, it is divided into three major classes. However, at the top of hierarchy, there is Big Brother – a mysterious leader, hero of the fabulous revolution which caused the change of regime. Being treated as the most relevant entity in the history of the country, he is given a kind of cult of personality. Nevertheless, as no one has ever seen Big Brother, he is assumed to be just a figure created by the Party. Speaking of the rest of the society, one may distinguish the following groups:

1. The Inner Party, consisting of the most privileged politicians who control every aspect of people's life;
2. The Outer Party, whose members work as low-level officials and bureaucrats. They blindly follow orders even if deep inside themselves they feel that it is not the proper thing;
3. Proles, who constitute the majority of society, approximately 70%. As the uneducated mass of people, they are easily manipulated and lied to by the Inner Party. They are able neither to rebel against the authorities nor to change their fate in any possible way.

The protagonist, Winston Smith, leads a miserable life deprived of pleasure and entertainment. After the loss of his family and being abandoned by his wife, he devotes his existence to silent fight with the Party and ideology. He expresses his disobedience by writing a diary which, although not illegal, is highly

undesirable and risky. Moreover, Winston undertakes some steps to join the legendary group of revolutionaries – the Brotherhood. Yet another instance of his protest is the affair with Julia, another Party member. Despite being successful at the beginning, Winston is unaware that the authorities know his every step and he is thoroughly observed. Finally, together with Julia, he is arrested and tortured till he expresses his affection towards Big Brother. Only then is he released and eventually – killed.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in the time of Cold War and, needless to say, it provoked political controversy. Literary critics claimed that *the novel's mythic power summed up the political experience of an entire generation* (Meyers 2001:289). It was not only an attack on communism, but also a warning against the danger which accompanies totalitarian ideology. Orwell was also praised for transferring political events into human experience and revealing the truth to intellectuals who had supported the Soviet Russia (Meyers 2001: 289).

As claimed by Carr (2010:129), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written to give a warning not only to the present, but also the future generation. Its message suggests that although political power brings real dangers, people cannot live without it. Still, one should stay vigilant and ensure it serves proper purposes and does not threaten human freedom.

On the basis of the novel, the following three metonymies and one synecdoche (a more specific class of metonymies) can be formulated:

### **THE PART FOR THE WHOLE METONYMY: BIG BROTHER STANDS FOR POLITICIANS**

Orwell depicts Big Brother as a mysterious hero glorified by the citizens of Oceania: *in the Party histories (...) Big Brother figured out as the leader and the guardian of the Revolution (Nineteen Eighty-Four:38)*. He is believed to be a figure responsible for creating new reality, but in fact he does not exist and is only an invented entity: *Big Brother is the embodiment of the Party (Nineteen Eighty-Four:272)*. Thus, one can consider this figure of speech as a metonymy, to be more precise: a synecdoche. The specific name (Big Brother) is used to refer to the more general group: people who are governing the country (politicians). Having been idealised, Big Brother serves a special purpose: he represents virtues which every member of the Party should have and, moreover, is – like the Party, *infallible and all-powerful (Nineteen Eighty-Four:261)*.

## **THE PART FOR THE WHOLE METONYMY: VOICE STANDS FOR PERSON IN CHARGE OF**

The citizens of Oceania are continuously controlled by means of telescreens installed in every house. Not only do they record what is happening, but also give commands and orders, using the voice: *the voice came from an oblong metal plaque (Nineteen Eighty-Four:3)*. The metonymic use of *voice* indicates that the role of people has been marginalised. The stress is put on activity alone, for instance: *yelled the voice from the telescreen (Nineteen Eighty-Four:238)*, *roared the voice (Nineteen Eighty-Four:247)* or *the voice from telescreen paused and added (Nineteen Eighty-Four:302)*. People are treated as tools, instruments necessary only for performing actions.

Moreover, one can easily notice that the discussed metonymy is negatively-loaded. Such quotations like: *a clipped military voice was reading out with a sort of brutal relish (Nineteen Eighty-Four:26)*, *her voice seemed to stick into his brain like jagged splinters of glass (Nineteen Eighty-Four:106)* and *from the telescreen a brassy female voice was squalling a patriotic song (Nineteen Eighty-Four:106)* clearly demonstrate that neither voice nor individuals being in charge of, are associated with positive emotions. On the contrary, the authorities – or – people responsible, are identified with violence, force, hatred and arrogance.

## **INSTITUTION FOR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE METONYMY: THE PARTY STANDS FOR ITS MEMBERS**

Another metonymy in the domain of POLITICS to be analysed is the relation between the Party and its members. Frequently, instead of human beings, the name of an institution is used. It is easily visible in the following examples: *the Party said (Nineteen Eighty-Four:37)*; *the terrible thing that party had done (Nineteen Eighty-Four:172)*; or *the party rejects and vilifies (Nineteen Eighty-Four:225)*. The organization is used with reference to politicians who are able to perform actions and activities requiring the use of senses. Thus, the Party functions as a metonymy representing its members.

Apart from activities, much importance is placed on manipulation and modifying people's worldview. The Party is said to create citizens' opinions and form their beliefs, for instance: *the Party taught that the proles were natural inferiors (Nineteen Eighty-Four:74)*; *the Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears (Nineteen Eighty-Four:84)*, and *whatever the Party holds truth, is truth (Nineteen Eighty-Four:261)*. Nonetheless, being an organisation, the Party is not able to think or act independently. Those activities are performed by its members for whom it stands.



## PLACE FOR THE EVENT METONYMY: ROOM 101 STANDS FOR THE COLLAPSE OF MAN

Room 101 is one of the offices in Ministry of Love, probably the most mysterious one – its purpose is revealed at the very end of the story. It refers to a terrible place which intimidates prisoners: *a woman was consigned to room 101 and Winston noticed, seemed to shrivel and turn, a different colour when she heard the words (Nineteen Eighty-Four:246)*. It stands for the moment in which a charged person experiences a mental breakdown.

Moreover, Room 101 represents the greatest fear of man, which differs from one individual to another. No one has ever overcome it, and consequently, Room 101 stands for the utter failure of humanity. That is why, as described by Orwell: *the thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world (Nineteen Eighty-Four:296)*. Taking into consideration the fact that this test is impossible to withstand, Room 101 is equated with the complete collapse of man.

### Conclusions

Regarding the analysed metonymic expressions in the domain of POLITICS in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one can safely conclude that political activity is structured almost exclusively within negative concepts. Probably it could be treated as one of the features of a totalitarian regime. The picture of politics in the novel is unambiguous – it is used as a means of gaining control over people, together with creating false reality and, consequently, a politician is somebody evil and unconscionable, abusing power to achieve personal gains.

However, metonymies, and their more specific subclasses such as synecdoche, used in the domain of politics do not only emphasize negative aspects of the concept itself. Their second function is transferring the responsibility for the decisions and activities. It is not the person (politician), who is charged or blamed for something, it has been done by the Party, Big Brother or other entity. What is also important, metonymic expressions serve another purpose as well – they belittle the role of people to simple tools which are necessary to perform an activity. Human voice, hand, or mind – without them political manipulation would be impossible. Again, emphasis is laid not on a person, but on the part of one that is already required.

Ultimately, it can be concluded that politics is unambiguously perceived as a negative and controversial issue, probably because of the possibilities it gives. The analysis has proved that political reality leaves a mark on human beings, needless to say, usually it is not a positive one. Nonetheless, politics is not an entirely evil force – these are people who seize the opportunity to use power to their own aims.

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