

Newspeak or Neospeak?

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Following [my blog on the language of economic debate yesterday](#) Ivan Horrocks [posted a comment](#) that I thought worth sharing more widely:

There was a very interesting discussion on a Radio 4 programme yesterday afternoon of George Orwell's concept of Newspeak (from 1984). The conclusion was that the shaping and control of language — and thus how we explain and understand the world — was as important as Orwell argued it was.

This morning I had a look at the Appendix to 1984 (The Principles of Newspeak). One interesting thing struck me. If the word Ingsoc (Newspeak was devised as a language to meet the needs of Ingsoc — English Socialism) is replaced by Neoliberalism it's a pretty accurate portrayal of the world that has actually evolved, rather than what Orwell imagined might happen. So to take one example from the book and "update" it:

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for a world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Neoliberalism, 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 Neoliberalism — should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words."

Interestingly the news spots either side of the Radio 4 programme prominently featured Cameron's latest measures to tackle the "hordes" of benefit tourists (sorry, immigrants) coming to the UK from the EU, followed by various comments from a representative from UKIP. It struck me that this was indeed an example of how far down the road of Neoliberal Newspeak we've already progressed.

Footnote: Orwell envisaged that the Newspeak project 'would have finally superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050.'

On my count we are way ahead of that timescale.

I fear Ivan is right. Matthew Parris confirmed it [on The Moral Maze last night](#).