

SPEAKING THE UNDENIABLE: A SPEECH ACT THEORY ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AND POWER IN GEORGE ORWELL'S 1984

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to analyse George Orwell's 1984 through linguistic lenses, specifically through the dual frameworks of Speech Act Theory and Gricean Pragmatics. Starting from the hypothesis that the novel portrays a totalitarian regime that exerts control not only through surveillance and oppression but through the systematic manipulation of language itself, this paper analyses selected utterances from the novel in order to explore how Orwellian language delivers speech acts, such as assertives, declaratives, and directives, as either tools of resistance or instruments of ideological domination. Based on the work of J.L. Austin and John Searle, the article demonstrates how illocutionary acts in 1984 often fail their felicity conditions under oppressive conditions, while others operate as coercive performatives backed by institutional power. In parallel, Grice's Cooperative Principle is used to convey how the Party's discourse repeatedly violates conversational maxims, particularly those of Quality and Relation, in order to destabilise truth and create cognitive dissonance among citizens. Through detailed close readings of selected representative passages, the article reasons that Orwell's dystopia reveals the fragility of meaningful communication in a world where both speaking and understanding are subject to political control. The study ultimately highlights how language, in 1984, became not only a means of expression but also a contested terrain of power.

Keywords: George Orwell; 1984; Speech Act Theory; Cooperative Principle; Language and Power.