

Loyal to the Group of Seventeen

The Urth list — 8 messages, 5 voices, 11 Jun 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3307>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Jun 2002, 15:31

Matthew asks:

Has anyone mentioned this is a response/riposte to Orwell and Nuspeak?

and Hartshorn replies:

It is obvious that it is derived from 1984 and Nuspeak. The idea that the Ascian's war may be derived from the eternal war between Oceana/Eastasia/Eurasia is a good one.

Ummm ... well, maybe a little, but the speech patterns of the Ascians are not derived from Newspeak. They are a clear and luminous reference to the habit that was for many years common in mainland China and among certain groups of "liberal" "intellectuals" in the US, of constantly quoting from the sayings of Mao Zedong -- or Mao Tse-Tung, as it was then spelled -- and treating such quotes as the final authority, in much the way some fundamentalist Christians treat quotes from Scripture.

bobking — 12 Jun 2002, 20:19 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I see a connection with Newspeak here, but more in the sense that Wolfe is rejecting Orwell's pessimism (if I'm interpreting him correctly) about the human mind's ability to overcome totalitarianism.

In 1984 Newspeak and the rest of Oceania's thought control obliterate all reality and history except for what the Party wants to present. The muddled and imprecise expression fostered by Newspeak ma

In TBOTNS, it seems that the Ascians have tried to do the same thing to an even greater extreme. Not only are only a certain selection of words allowed, as in Newspeak, but Ascians can only speak (and

But for Wolfe, humanity is able to overcome these hobbles. Even using only the approved phrases, Loyal to the Group of 17 can tell the story he wants to tell and try to win the contest. Totalitarianis

I much prefer Wolfe's more optimistic vision to the one Orwell proposed (although Orwell's idea seemingly had a lot going for it in the 1940s). And I think history has proven Wolfe right -- the commun

-- Bob

On Tue, 11 Jun 2002 08:31:37 -0700 Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <ddanehy at siebel.com> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Jun 2002, 20:47 · follows bobking

Bob King wrote...

H'mmm. Bob, your long one-line paragraphs are getting cut off. Perhaps you can use the occasional carriage-return/line-feed?

I see a connection with Newspeak here, but more in the sense that Wolfe is rejecting Orwell's pessimism (if I'm interpreting him correctly) about the human mind's ability to overcome totalitarianism.

Well, yeah, I agree with that, at least; Orwell's totalitarian state was involved in a pragmatic application of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that suggests that our perceptions of reality are defined and delimited by our language; the Group of Seventeen seem to be doing much the same thing. Nonetheless, I hold and insist that the more direct application of "Correct Thought" is to the Mao-quoting habits of Chinese Communists, especially in the '60s and '70s.

I wonder also if the choice of the number seventeen is significant -- perhaps a sort of sideways reference to another sfnal instantiation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. I refer, of course to Samuel R. Delany's novel in which a language with no words for "I" and "You" plays a major role -- Babel-17.

You are trapped in that bright moment when you learned your doom

Andy Robertson — 12 Jun 2002, 21:55 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>
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Interesting thought. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has a long pedigree in SF (cf Vance THE LANGUAGES OF PAO) but is almost certainly untrue.

In fact we now know that children brought up in a civilisation that spoke only in these tags would spontaneously Creolise the language, generating a real language with a built in grammar from it.

At what time did Chomskyan ideas about language - intrinsic, built-in metagrammar - become standard? Did Wolfe know?

hartshorn

bobking — 12 Jun 2002, 20:18 · follows Andy Robertson

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Jun 2002, 21:17 · follows bobking

Hartshorn writes...

Interesting thought. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has a long pedigree in SF (cf Vance THE LANGUAGES OF PAO) but is almost certainly untrue.

I think "too strong" is probably more accurate than "untrue." Language, along with other mental structures, does pretty clearly guide the way we think about things. It doesn't have the property of absolute constraint/restraining that Sapir-Whorf suggests.

One of the reasons Sapir-Whorf (whether or not named as such) has so strong a pedigree in SF is doubtless its strongest instantiation, the study of General Semantics, founded by Count Alfred Korzybski, which essentially claims that most if not all "mental" problems stem from the use of "language" that does not correspond to "reality." (I place those words in quotes because in g-s they have special technical meanings.) General semantics has (to a greater or lesser extent) influenced a large number of SF writers directly, including van Vogt, Heinlein, and Delany; it seems likely enough that it also influences others indirectly through these.

In fact we now know that children brought up in a civilisation that spoke only in these tags would spontaneously Creolise the language, generating a real language with a built in grammar from it.

H'mmm. I think to say "we know" is, again, a bit too strong: "we have strong reason to believe," yes. Some popularizers (Pinker comes readily to mind) have a tendency to state these things as firm and established fact, when we're dealing in an area where experimentation is nearly impossible and field data is always already tainted by interaction with other cultures.

At what time did Chomskyan ideas about language - intrinsic, built-in metagrammar - become standard? Did Wolfe know?

I don't know if they are "standard," but they are certainly influential and taught in most linguistics curricula. I think the whole "deep grammar" idea is still somewhat controversial, despite the claims of, once again, Pinker that the whole thing is settled.

Burro: An ass. Burrow: A hole in the ground. Be sure you know the difference.

tom — 13 Jun 2002, 13:24 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes writes:

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Wolfe alludes to this favorably (in Plan[e]t Engineering, I think) where he mentions that we tend to think of politics and economics as separate things because we have no word that combines the two.

Tom

Jerry Friedman — 13 Jun 2002, 22:45 · follows tom

--- bobking at gate.net wrote:

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...

You may be right about Wolfe's intentions, but on the other hand, for all we know LttGo17 might have met a fate like Winston Smith's had he not been lucky enough to get captured.

Jerry Friedman