

“Seducers of the people”¹: Mapping the Linguistic Shift

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ABSTRACT

In his book on propaganda Jacques Ellul acknowledges the unsavoury connotation - which is a common place of today's culture - surrounding those who write to influence a public. This is an interpretation which is frequently applied to the government propaganda writers of the First World War, yet to do so removes those writers from their context and applies modern understanding to a historical act. Over the last century since the Great War society has developed, causing a social linguistic shift. This shift has affected the way propaganda is understood, and propaganda in an Edwardian sense is not simply synonymous with propaganda as the term is interpreted and used today. My paper demonstrates how this word has undergone lexical development over the intervening years since the War, using corpus-based analysis to track the definition of the term ‘propaganda’ in Oxford English Dictionaries using the Antconc database software. I combine this quantitative research with in-depth exploration of propaganda theories from the Twentieth Century, and examples of First World War propaganda to ascertain when in history, if indeed a certain time was pivotal, this word began to mutate. This paper argues that better understanding of the development of this term reveals the contradictory nature of many modern-day attitudes to the relationship between literature and politics; the disconnect often at play between how we view our own modern culture and the judgements we are tempted to make about the past.

Keywords: Propaganda, Wellington House, First World War, George Creel

“A common view of propaganda is that it is the work of a few evil men, seducers of the people, cheats and authoritarian rulers who want to dominate a population [...]. According to this view, the public is just an object, a passive crowd that one can manipulate, influence and use.”
(Ellul, 1973: 118)



1. Introduction

Trudi Tate, (2013: 58) reflecting on the Great War and the call to arms of artists and literary figures in aid of an official agenda, claims that “propaganda can seem like an act of betrayal”. This view of those who write to promote government aims is a common place of today’s culture where the term carries an unsavoury connotation; the influencing of a populace through the written word can be understood as manipulative and immoral, as truth is seen to be concealed and lies propounded. Yet this interpretation is neither comprehensive, nor static. Over the last century (and certainly since the cessation of fighting in 1918) society has developed; not only accelerated technological advances, but increasing secularization, consumerism, rise of mass media and advertising have brought about a social linguistic shift. Whilst the “demonic implications” (Miller, 2005: 15) of the word ‘propaganda’ may have been less pronounced in the Edwardian era, modern critics regularly accuse those who wrote for official agencies during the First World War of crimes against truth; in doing so, however, they remove writers from their context and apply a modern understanding to a historic act. Whilst discussing John Buchan for instance, in a text which otherwise serves as a markedly staunch defence of the writer and his motives during the war, John Burnett and Kate Mackay (2014: X) casually (and perhaps without intentional censure) charge him with the role of propagandist. They state, quite rightly, that Buchan was the Government’s Director of Information, yet add in parenthesis that this “meant propaganda”. Whilst largely a benign comment, this statement betrays a contemporary sensibility that there is no difference between politically produced information, and that problematic word ‘propaganda’. Peter Buitenhuis (1989: 94) is less charitable in his analysis of Buchan’s role during the war, accusing him of “falsify[ing] the whole military situation on the Western Front” due to the positive ‘spin’ his writing often gave to the events that were taking place in Europe.

It is the concern that writers may have manipulated their writing to fulfil an agenda, potentially falsifying facts, which is responsible for the term’s reputation as a tool of deceit—a suspicion which it struggles to escape. Cate Haste (1977: 2) claims that propaganda is “most effective if public access to truth is severely restricted”, whilst Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1994: 238) speak of a public that is “corrupted” by the organised propagation of opinion. There is a sense of manipulation and deception implied by these statements, and an allusion to a public that is misled by an official organisation. Yet it is important to consider the decades in which these claims were pronounced; the Cold War and Vietnam War were prevalent in the common psyche at the time, and a shift in public thinking has emerged due to those conflicts. Herman and Chomsky (1994: 234) even allude to a ‘Vietnam syndrome’ which was created, resulting in a “disparity between the public and its ‘leaders’”. This is not a phenomenon which is unique to the Vietnam conflict (the Twenty First Century, indeed, finds itself in a very similar situation), rather it was the first example of a ‘media’ war, with live stream television (as opposed to staged reporting) providing an actual uncensored footage of the campaign. This made the role of propaganda much more difficult; it became impossible for a narrative to be constructed when the public was faced with the truth. This heralds our own relationship to war and the propaganda of war, and indeed it is common to all propaganda of conflict in a mass media and democratic context.

This controlled dissemination of information has been referred to as the propagation of “organized myth” (Ellul, 1973: 11), a phrase which alludes to deceit and falsehood being practised by institutional propagandist agencies. Whilst these agencies are not always necessarily governmental, Harold Lasswell (1927: 14) argues that “all governments are engaged to some extent in propaganda”, and Jacques Ellul (1973: 62) confirms this, stating that it is this political propaganda of governments which is “the type called immediately to mind by the word propaganda”. Mark Crispin Miller (2005: 10), however, recognises the word’s prevailing Catholic sentiments, warning that the religious origins are not to be ignored (the genesis of the term relates to a committee of Cardinals founded by Pope Gregory XV in 1622). This tension between a political and theological use of the word ‘propaganda’ demonstrates how problematic it can be to attempt to compartmentalise a term which has come to be understood differently by varying groups of people. Ellul attempts to portray how diffuse the range of its meanings has become by listing a number of attempts made by various personages to reach a definition (1973: xii). These attempts are over-complicated, often vague, and lack cohesion amongst themselves. There is an agreement that propaganda is of importance to the individual, that there is a sense of control or influence involved, but whether this stimulus is a psychological manipulation, or simply an honest attempt to change attitudes or opinion, remains unsolved by Ellul.

Indeed, it is this sense of uncertainty which was, for me, intrinsic to the term’s interpretation and definition in society; if its meaning can vary from the religious to the bureaucratic, and if there is debate over the integrity of the intended purpose of propaganda, perhaps its meaning can also vary over time from the Great War to more recent hostilities. Herman and Chomsky’s (1994: 164) observations of the effect of the conflict in Vietnam, and the subsequent lack of trust in government information (which they accuse of “exposing the general population to [the war’s] horrors and [...] unfair, incompetent, and biased coverage”) present the power social events have to alter the definition of a word (or at least how it is understood socially). Thus it can be argued that current understanding of the term ‘propaganda’ has been shaped by the events of the latter part of the Twentieth Century.

Alain Badiou (2016: 18) explores this sense of linguistic evolution by commenting on the understanding of the term ‘terrorism’, stating that it has undergone a “semantic evolution” over time. Part of the reason for this fluidity, Badiou (2016: 20) argues, is that ‘terrorism’ is a “non-existent substance, an empty name”; it is an abstract idea rather than a scientific certitude. In a similar manner, Edward Bernays (2005: 73) points out that propaganda “can never be an exact science for the reason that its subject-matter [...] deals with human beings.” There can be no certainty in any word, and much less so in one which relates to the abstract and whose interpretation is subject to a varied human observation. The term ‘propaganda’ does not signify a concrete, but rather an abstract, idea and is therefore subject to this diversity of definition. It is important to recall the problematic relationship between sign and signifier, popular in twentieth-century western thought, and the Saussurean (1966: 10) claim of language as a convention where the “nature of the sign that is agreed upon does not matter”; words evade concrete definition, and are merely the result of societal apperception and progression over time.

Indeed, Muriel Grant (2013: 56) notes that the term ‘propaganda’ “changed its meaning” during the 1920s and 1930s, “taking on new, negative connotations” as a result of the British publicity campaign during the First World War. Lasswell (1927: 2), too, (who was writing during the era to which Grant refers) declared that “a word has appeared, which has come to have an ominous clang in many minds: Propaganda”. Lasswell’s use of the word ‘appeared’ here is indicative of the changing status of the term over time; he hints that it achieved greater prevalence in the aftermath of the Great War than it had previously boasted, in addition to gaining a new ‘ominous’ connotation. ‘Propaganda’ was not a new word (its religious roots, as previously noted, date back to the Seventeenth Century), rather an existing one which was put to new use; certainly, the term is far from static. However, to examine propaganda and to attempt to unravel the motives and morality of those who wrote it is an impossible task. Hazel Hutchison (2015: 56) reminds us that writers who attempted to articulate the war and their experiences through their writing should not always be characterised as propagandists, that to do so “oversimplifies the relationship between literary and political activity”. Hutchison is perhaps warning against this characterisation of propagandists as they are understood in today’s culture; if an Edwardian context was to be re-applied to the term, it could become more acceptable to write under its banner.

George Orwell (2013: 9), in one of his best-known essays ‘Politics and the English Language’, offers the definitive mid-twentieth century analysis of how a decline in language has led to clichéd phrases being used, which (although boasting a shared and accepted social understanding) in reality lack clear meaning and are, in fact, ambiguous. In a similar way to Badiou, he takes a word (in this case ‘fascism’) and examines how its meaning has developed. He claims that ‘fascism’ now has “no meaning except in so far as it signifies ‘something not desirable’. [...] there is no agreed definition.” For the modern society, ‘propaganda’, also, has become ambiguous, one is simply aware that it is ‘not desirable’. Orwell (2013: 9) goes on to argue that words, such as ‘fascism’ (words that have no agreed definition) are “often used in a consciously dishonest way”, and that each person who uses them has “his own private definition”. The term ‘propaganda’ itself can be manipulated and changed to suit the user, and perhaps those who accuse writers of dishonesty in the name of propaganda are in fact doing so in a dishonest way. Whether or not authors created propaganda during the First World War is not the important argument here, rather what this paper hopes to achieve is to demonstrate that propaganda (in an Edwardian sense) is simply not synonymous with ‘propaganda’ as the term is understood and used today.

In addition to understanding the development of the linguistic interpretation of propaganda, it is important to explore the various ways it was disseminated, and the forms it could present. Herman and Chomsky’s (1994: 32) text offers a tier system which influential media can follow: the information stems from the top tier and filters down into all levels of society, and propaganda campaigns “in general [are] closely attuned to elite interests”. This illustration demonstrates how propaganda is created by, and to the benefit of, the elite tier with the consequences felt by the general public further down the scale. It is this trickling down of information from the elite which also accounts for the negativity surrounding public information; the common man believes himself deceived and manipulated by the ruling classes. It is a propaganda model which “suggest[s] that

the ‘societal purpose’ of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state.” (Herman & Chomsky, 1994: 298). The word ‘dominate’ is crucial; it implies that those with privileged positions control the remainder of society by creating propaganda which benefits them, and not necessarily reflecting the common interest. Ellul (1973: 119), however, disagrees with this: he argues that whilst “it is easy to understand the moralist’s hostility to propaganda: man is the innocent victim pushed into evil ways by the propagandist; the propagandee is entirely without blame because he has been fooled and has fallen into a trap”, in reality “the individual must participate in all this from the bottom of his heart, with pleasure and deep satisfaction.” Propaganda is only successful if the individual participates and the public cannot claim to be wholly victimised when they are instrumental as participants.

Moreover, Ellul (1973: 15) differentiates between overt and covert propaganda: covert propaganda, he argues, “tends to hide its aims, identity, significance, and source. The people are not aware that someone is trying to influence them, and do not feel that they are being pushed in a certain direction.” This explains from where the sense of deception stems; the propagandee is being influenced without realizing this is so. This differs from what Ellul (1973: 15) terms ‘overt’ propaganda where there is a “Ministry of Propaganda; one admits that propaganda is being made; its source is known; its aims and intentions are identified. The public knows that an attempt is being made to influence it.” With this in mind, the propaganda undertaken by Edwardian writers could fall into the latter of the two types: to a certain extent, First World War propaganda was overt with the Authors’ Declaration being printed in *The Times* on the 18th September 1914, and with Buchan openly taking on the role of Director of Information. However, there was a great deal of secrecy surrounding the Wellington House organisation, as its leader Charles Masterman believed “that for propaganda to be truly effective its actual source and nature must be concealed” (Scott, 1996: 1). There is less deception in a propaganda which is overt; the public knows they are being influenced, and it is their choice to accept the information or not. Again, this places more of the responsibility on the individual, diminishing their victim status. Furthermore, Ellul (1973: 15) extends his argument and claims that “overt propaganda is necessary for attacking enemies”; there is much done during conflict that would not be considered morally acceptable in times of peace, yet the undertaking of such is accepted in order to achieve victory. Propaganda is no different.

2. Oxford English Dictionaries

To find evidence for this complex understanding of propaganda, and to prove its semantic development, it is necessary to analyse the changes in its definition over time; I decided that dictionary representation was the most effective way to achieve this. To maintain consistency amongst the results I chose to look only at Oxford English Dictionaries in order that discrepancies between publishers could be discounted. Furthermore, the Oxford dictionaries provide evidence from the beginning of the Twentieth Century through to the Twenty-first, thereby giving a comprehensive linguistic overview of the last hundred years. In January of 2016 I was invited to use the archives at Oxford

University Press where I was given access to all printed editions of the dictionary. The research included the Full, Concise, and Shorter dictionaries to ensure a wider data set, as lexicographical work and revision were undertaken in the production of the Shorter and Concise publications (rather than a mere abridgement of content from the Full Dictionary), allowing for differences in definition across the publications. Despite the OED now being accessible online, it was not possible to access all historic prints of the dictionary without visiting the archives at the Press. Also available for analysis were the hand-written copy slips which were submitted in the late 1800s as suggestions for definition and use of the term ‘propaganda’. These quotation slips were gathered from volunteer members of the public, who were requested to read material from three periods of English Literature: from 1250 to 1526, from 1526 to 1674, and from 1674 to the present-day. These periods were chosen as the founders of the dictionary felt they “represented the existence of different trends in the language’s development” (Winchester, 1998: 95). The submitted quotations included suggestions of definition and examples of use in context, and James Murray (the dictionary’s primary editor) hoped that “ideally there would be at least one sentence from the literature for each century in which the word was used” (Winchester, 1998: 135). This formed the basis for my choosing Oxford dictionaries over alternative publications: the definitions are generated from public use rather than by a central establishment agency. This method of gathering quotations meant that the “sense of every single word in the [English] language” could be illustrated, and that the dictionary “could show exactly how a word has been employed over the centuries, how it has undergone subtle changes of shades of meaning” (Winchester, 1998: 24).

However, this method also meant that there would inevitably be a time lag; the dictionary is bound to be slightly behind in its response to current usage of a term, as it takes time to register subtle changes within social discourse. These are the limitations of an “evidence-based approach to language study” (Gilliver, 2016: 2). Yet despite this time lag, close readings of the copy slips provide an extra resource and assist in giving an overview of the understanding of propaganda at the close of the Nineteenth Century, in addition to demonstrating the revision and variations that were already taking place in the late 1800s.

I used the corpus database software, Antconc, a tool which tracks associated words within range of a main target word. The programme creates lists of key words, ranks the frequency of associated words, and provides visual representations of words’ locations within texts. My first step in tracking the development of propaganda was to find the most common terms found under the dictionary entries. This was to give an indication of which words are most commonly associated with propaganda, and whether this semantic field has evolved over the Twentieth Century (thereby influencing how the term is interpreted by the public in different decades). The earliest publication available to be sampled was the 1909 fascicle (the name given to each separate instalment of the dictionary). This was the year the ‘O-P’ volume of the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* was published for the first time, and therefore was the first time the definition of ‘propaganda’ was printed by the Oxford Dictionary. From 1909 the publications span the Twentieth Century, culminating with the 2007 edition (at the time of my research, it was this 2007 edition that was available online also).

The definitions of ‘propaganda’ from each edition of the Oxford English Dictionary were collated and entered into the software. Words such as connectives, definite and indefinite articles, and the term ‘propaganda’ itself were entered into a ‘stop list’ to prevent them from appearing among the list of terms and thereby confusing the search results. A ‘word list’ can then be created by the software; this is a list of every word found within the group of dictionary definitions, and which ranks the words in order of frequency of appearance from the most, thorough to the least commonly occurring. Furthermore, the visual representations that can be produced demonstrate which editions have the most occurrences of certain associated words, and will show the year that they begin to appear in the fascicles. The aim is to ascertain when it was (if indeed there is a moment in history which proves pivotal) the word ‘propaganda’ came to stand for something deplorable, rather than a word which, as Bernays (2005: 50) argues, “in its proper meaning is a perfectly wholesome word, of honest parentage, and with an honourable history.”

3. Quotation slips

Pictured below are two of the original copy slips which were submitted during the appeal for public readers; James Murray requested that the public write their target word at the top left of these slips, “arrange them alphabetically and send [the slips] on to the Scriptorium” (Winchester, 1998: 119). The Scriptorium was the name given to the additional building constructed to house the sheer volume of quotation slips; one and three-quarter tonnes of paper was initially transferred there (Gilliver, 2016: 111), and the final twelve-volume publication contains over 1,800,000 “illustrative quotations” (Winchester, 1998: 189). Not all the quotations would appear in the published fascicles, yet by analysing those slips that did survive to publication it is possible to see the physical act of revision that took place when attempting to finalise a definition of propaganda, as well as understanding how the word was used and interpreted before the end of the Nineteenth Century.

It can be seen from Figure 1 how the definition underwent revision; words and entire sentences are discarded in favour of alternatives which impact, if albeit only slightly, the final meaning. ‘Doctrine’ and ‘belief’ are omitted for ‘principles’, and the word ‘organised’ is added. This new addition creates the idea of institutionalised, rather than individual, information - an idea which is echoed by the ‘systematic scheme’ found in Figure 2. In the second quotation slip the amendments do not transform the meaning (for example ‘kind of institution’ is scored through and the synonymous ‘association’ is chosen instead); it is only the syntax that is altered. The revisions were made by James Murray, the chief editor, who would have final say on how the definition appeared in print. The quotations would be stored away alphabetically whereupon the editorial staff decided upon which would appear in the dictionary, and then compiled additional slips containing the definitions and etymologies (McCulloch, 2017).

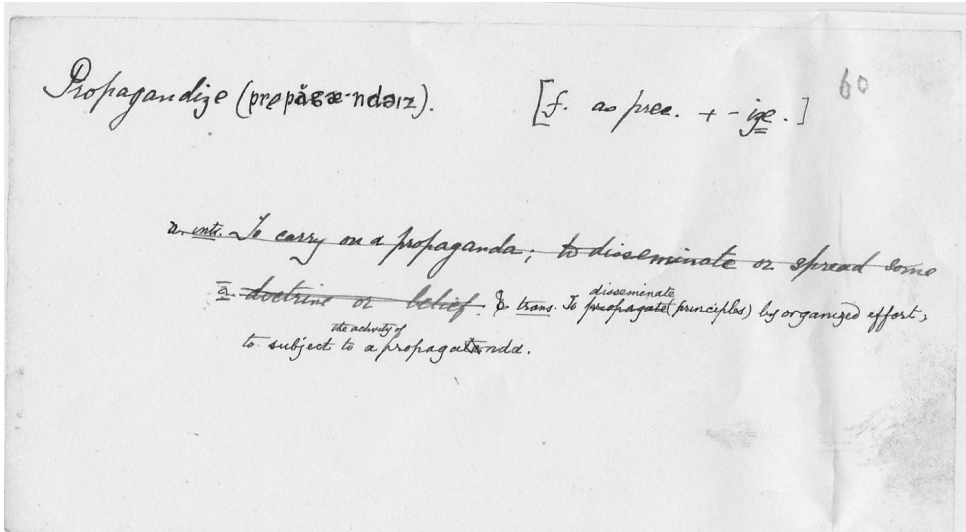


Figure 1: Copy Slip 60

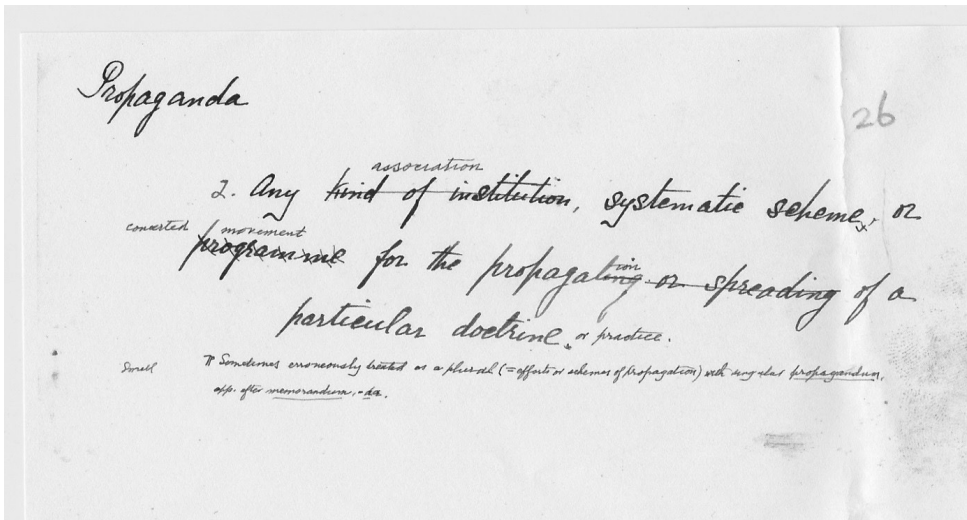


Figure 2: Copy Slip 26

It is clear to see in these examples the process of revision that took place even before the dictionaries were printed. However, even once these revised definitions appeared in print, there was still no guarantee of a concrete status. Ellul (1973: 18) talks about the

“changeability of propaganda” and it is this changeability (both of the term and of the act of producing the material) which is of interest.

4. Religion

I wished to see how this change manifested itself over time; a pattern which I hoped would be revealed through the mapping of the term within the OED. Returning to the Antconc software, and the wordlist of associated terms it created, I found that within the top ten words were three with religious connotations: ‘cardinals’, ‘congregation’, ‘missions’. These occurred fifty-three times in total and were present in twenty of the twenty-one editions (it is only the 1982 supplement to the *New English Dictionary* which does not contain any reference to these words). There is, then, a theological context surrounding the term ‘propaganda’ with its original definition referring to the evangelical committee founded in 1622 to promote the Catholic faith. This semantic field is evident in the 1909 *New English Dictionary* [the definition reads: “(More fully, *Congregation* or *College of the Propaganda*) A committee of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church having the care and oversight of foreign missions, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV” (1909:1466)], and prevails through to the 2007 Shorter edition [“a committee of cardinals responsible for foreign missions, founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV” (2007: 2369)], where it remains the first entry under the definition. Etymologically, this shows that despite Ellul’s argument that the term is most commonly associated with the political sphere, the origins of propaganda are theologically rooted, and this religious legacy endures; Miller’s claim of a lasting Catholic aura, therefore, boasts truth.

Ellul (1973: 191) discusses the necessity of the Church indulging in the act of propagation to promote their faith and gain followers, in addition to the way in which “churches often participate[d] in campaigns [...] designed to demonstrate the participation in civic affairs.” Not only did the Christian institution wield power over its own followers, but this cooperation with secular pursuits highlights the power within the Church to influence a populace; religion and the act of propagation are intrinsically bound. Ellul (1973: 230) goes on to argue, however, that by taking on this role of propagandist (especially for theological self-promotion) Christianity “ceases to be an overwhelming power and spiritual adventure and becomes institutionalized in all its expressions and compromised in all its actions.” There is in this statement another reference to the organised nature of propaganda regarding the institutionalising of the Church. Moreover, Ellul contends that to partake in the act of propaganda is to ultimately undermine the intended message. This echoes Herman and Chomsky’s theory of the corruptive influence of propaganda.

Theological discourse, then, appears to be a vital component of propaganda; returning to the Antconc database, I extracted all terms from the definitions which I felt adhered to this religious lexicon: ‘church’, ‘catholic’, ‘congregation’, ‘cardinals’, ‘missions’, ‘faith’, ‘pope’, ‘roman’. These terms were entered into an advanced search and plotted using the concordance tool. This tool provides a visual representation of the frequency of these words throughout the dictionary editions, and the results of this search are visible in Figure 3.

Concordance Hits		83	Total Plots		20
HIT FILE: 1	FILE: 1909 new english.txt		No. of Hits = 10	File Length (in chars) = 434	
HIT FILE: 2	FILE: 1911 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 5	File Length (in chars) = 266	
HIT FILE: 3	FILE: 1926 concise 2nd edition.txt		No. of Hits = 2	File Length (in chars) = 422	
HIT FILE: 4	FILE: 1933 Shorter.txt		No. of Hits = 3	File Length (in chars) = 275	
HIT FILE: 5	FILE: 1933 1 volume supplement.txt		No. of Hits = 8	File Length (in chars) = 915	
HIT FILE: 6	FILE: 1934 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 5	File Length (in chars) = 283	
HIT FILE: 7	FILE: 1944 Shorter.txt		No. of Hits = 3	File Length (in chars) = 273	
HIT FILE: 8	FILE: 1951 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 5	File Length (in chars) = 317	
HIT FILE: 9	FILE: 1964 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 5	File Length (in chars) = 317	
HIT FILE: 10	FILE: 1973 Shorter.txt		No. of Hits = 3	File Length (in chars) = 273	
HIT FILE: 11	FILE: 1976 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 2	File Length (in chars) = 194	
HIT FILE: 12	FILE: 1982 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 2	File Length (in chars) = 198	
HIT FILE: 14	FILE: 1989 Oxford English second edition (full).txt		No. of Hits = 9	File Length (in chars) = 894	
HIT FILE: 15	FILE: 1990 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 2	File Length (in chars) = 251	
HIT FILE: 16	FILE: 1993 Shorter.txt		No. of Hits = 3	File Length (in chars) = 416	
HIT FILE: 17	FILE: 1995 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 2	File Length (in chars) = 296	
HIT FILE: 18	FILE: 1999 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 4	File Length (in chars) = 230	
HIT FILE: 19	FILE: 2002 Shorter.txt		No. of Hits = 3	File Length (in chars) = 416	
HIT FILE: 20	FILE: 2004 Concise.txt		No. of Hits = 4	File Length (in chars) = 228	
HIT FILE: 21	FILE: 2007 Shorter.txt		No. of Hits = 3	File Length (in chars) = 416	

Figure 3: Concordance

It is seen from the table that religious terms appear eighty-three times in total, and again are only missing from the 1982 supplement. The above concordance diagram demonstrates the heavy use of theological terminology in the definition of 'propaganda' throughout the Twentieth Century, and how this theme is maintained through to the Twenty-first. Moreover, a certain level of stability is discernible: whilst there does appear to be a 'dying out' in that the 1909 fascicle boasts ten occurrences, whereas there are only three occurrences of religious terms in 2007, there is however a spike in the 1989 publication with the total increasing back to nine occurrences (one more than what appeared in the 1933 supplement). Indeed, these peaks are always to be found within the full editions or its supplements, hinting more at a difference in dictionary style rather than lexical development over the century. Moreover, there are only two instances of religious terms in the 1926 Concise Dictionary—two less than the 2004 Concise.

There does not seem to be any convincing evidence, therefore, of a decrease in the use of this religious vocabulary between the beginning of the Twentieth, through to the start of the Twenty-first Century. This, to a small extent, acts as a contradiction to Badiou's theory of an evolving lexicon, if only in relation to this religious interpretation of propaganda; the theological root for the word is strong, and so cannot be escaped. It is partly this religious connotation of the word that makes propaganda so effective, as it taps into deeply held shared values and a desire for belonging: Ellul (1973: 7) points out that, when it comes to the production of propaganda, "the individual never is considered as an individual, but always in terms of what he has in common with others, such as his motivations, his feelings, or his myths". Lasswell (1927: 71) confirms that since the "flaming vocabulary of religion still has the power to move the hearts of many men, it is a poor propagandist who neglects the spiritual and ecclesiastical interpretation". What Lasswell is showing here is that a religious sect may use propaganda for its own purpose, at the same time as propaganda can manipulate religious beliefs to achieve a motive; in this case he is referring to the adoption of religious lexicon by the British government during the First World War to influence and motivate the public. There is a strong bond between the theological and the bureaucratic, as well as an association between governmental affairs and propaganda. The next step, therefore, was to map this political context within the dictionaries and compare the results to those produced through the theological word lists and searches, thereby ascertaining whether a political association boasts the same longevity as the religious.

5. Politics

Walter Lippman (1956: 248), writing on strategic influencing of the public through organised dissemination, stated that "persuasion has become a [...] regular organ of popular government". There are two very important things to note in this statement: the first is Lippman's verb compound 'has become' which implies a state of transition, a progression from one concept to another; it alludes to a lack of stasis. It highlights that propaganda as a term, and as an act, is mobile; Badiou's theory of an evolutionary semantics is recalled and there is acknowledgement that the meaning of propaganda has altered over time. Second to note is Lippman's recognition of the use of public influencing by government; he does not actually use the word 'propaganda' but his

argument of government adopting the act of 'persuasion' reveals mobility towards a more political agenda. Furthermore, given the period in which Lippman was writing (the text was originally published in 1922), it can be accepted that this was a progression which was beginning to take place as early as the second decade of the Twentieth Century. Propaganda was becoming political.

It is interesting to discover, though, that the definitions found in the dictionaries do not appear to reflect the timeline of progression as noted by these critics. Another Antconc search was conducted using the term 'politic*' (the asterisk was included to encompass all possible suffixes of the term, for words such as 'political' and 'politics' etc.). The results from this revealed that there were, in fact, only two instances of 'politic*' throughout the dictionary editions, and that these did not appear until near the close of the Twentieth Century. Both the 1999 and 2004 concise editions have identical definitions, and are the only publications to discuss politics. The definition reads: "information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view" (1999: 1145).

Therefore, if a conclusion was based purely on the corpus statistics, it could be claimed that the idea of a political propaganda did not come into recognition until the end of the Twentieth Century; we have here a tangible demonstration of that time lag of the dictionaries reacting to social linguistic shifts. However, the argument could also be made that this development in the late Twentieth Century could be due, in part, to the end of the Cold War in 1991. Gary D. Rawnsley (1999: 3), in his introduction to *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s*, claims that both sides "reduced [the Cold War's] many complexities to arguments and explanations which would be easily understood and accepted by public opinion at home" and that "our own perceptions of the Cold War have been clouded by such undemanding imagery". Tony Shaw (1999: 140) hints at the high level of propaganda material being produced during that era, when British news-reels (coupled with feature films) were "predominantly anti-soviet", meaning that "cinema audiences tended to receive a consistent message". Rawnsley attributes propaganda as having a profound influence on perception of the Cold War, which would in turn influence how propaganda was regarded from that point onwards. The Oxford dictionaries, perhaps, reflect this.

Furthermore, to rely solely on the statistics from Antconc would be to create a false impression. It has previously been demonstrated how Lippman was already becoming aware of a political propagandist agenda by the 1920s, yet there is evidence which hints that a governmental propaganda existed as early as the Nineteenth Century (the Crimean War, for example, saw censorship of the Press by the French, and reports in British newspapers of the reality of life in the warzone) (Cull, Culbert and Welch, 2003: 99). Furthermore, the copy slip (seen below) was produced in 1842 (over sixty years prior to when Lippman was writing, and over a century before the Antconc corpus shows that Oxford dictionaries acknowledged a political context), and states how "the name propaganda is applied to modern political language". From this, two conflicting ideas can be developed. Firstly, it can be derived from the date of the slip that a political interpretation is not a recent development, but rather that it has existed since at least the end of the Nineteenth Century. Contrarily, the word 'modern' is used which alludes to a progression in political linguistics; perhaps the name propaganda could not be applied to

language that is not modern? This ambiguity is what makes a concrete definition of propaganda so troublesome.

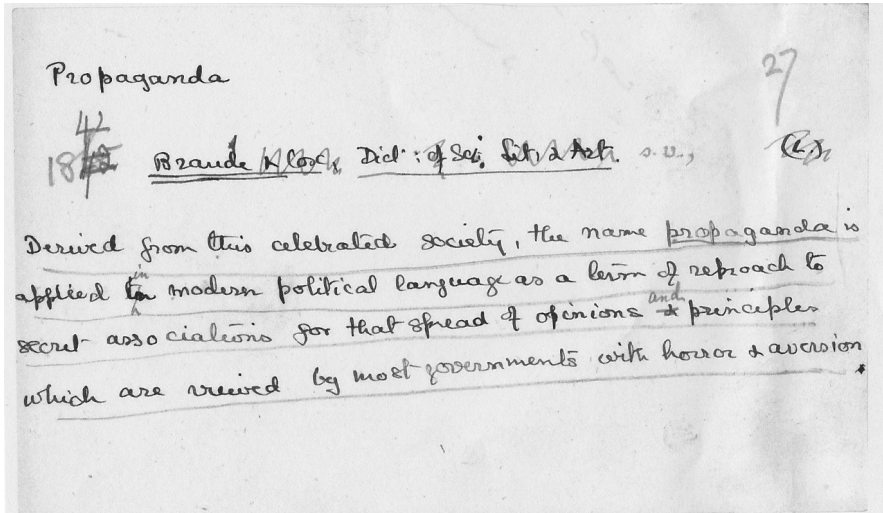


Figure 4: Copy Slip 27

What is most striking in this copy slip, however, is the affiliation between a political propaganda and unfavourable vocabulary: the writer mentions propaganda being used (in political language) as a ‘term of reproach’ and inducing ‘horror and aversion’. This, combined with the definition from the concise dictionaries, which states that the information used in propaganda for a political cause is of a “biased or misleading nature” (1999: 1145), alludes to a direct correlation between government-led propaganda and a lack of accountability; there is support here for Haste’s earlier claim that to produce propaganda was to withhold truth from the public, even if only when used in a political context.

This association is one of which George Creel, writing in the 1920s, appears acutely aware; his text *How We Advertised America* provides a contemporaneous analysis of the propaganda used in the United States during the First World War. The text gives detailed overviews of many of the various techniques used by the Committee on Public Information to influence the American citizens, including the pamphlets which were distributed over the German lines (thereby having the potential to indoctrinate the German army and civilian population with Allied proselytism). Creel (1920: 4) goes to great lengths throughout the text to distance himself and his Committee from the stain of the word ‘propaganda’, for (he states) that word “in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption”. Creel acknowledges the distaste that surrounded the term as early as 1920. However, he attributes the cause of this to be the German misuse and abuse of propaganda. He himself claims that the United States did not partake in propaganda, rather the “world’s greatest adventure in advertising” (Creel, 1920: 4). Reading Creel’s text, it is difficult to escape the feeling that one is, in fact, a victim of

this propaganda which he is so eager to evade; Creel's work acts as a justification—a defence—of American Great War propaganda, and he employs all his skill to convince the reader that if propaganda is distasteful, then America's contribution is not propaganda. The text is self-justifying, self-promoting, and continues to exalt the American Army long after the conflict has drawn to a close. For example, whilst discussing the distribution of pamphlets over the enemy lines, Creel (1920: 6) states that “these pamphlets blew as a great wind against the clouds of confusion and misrepresentation.” This is hyperbolic rhetoric; the lexicon employed here is done so in order to influence, and cause emotion in the reader. It is a form of propaganda.

In fact, much of Creel's (1920: 14) attempts at glorifying the honesty and “stainless patriotism and unspotted Americanism” serve to undermine his desire to evade the ‘stain’ of propaganda. For instance, he refers to the “deluded soldiers” of the Central Powers; this is not an unbiased analysis. The word ‘deluded’ influences the reader, forcing a perception and an interpretation upon them. Furthermore, he declares that there was no enforced censorship, yet later describes how the use of feature films was used to present “the wholesome life of America, giving fair ideas of our people and our institutions” (1920: 281), and to suppress the negative impression of America that was created globally by the thriller movies popular in the past. This suppression is, in itself, an act of censorship; American life was being remoulded and redesigned for the global stage by Creel and his Committee, and the image that was released was carefully calculated. In the introduction to the text, Dr. Newton D. Baker (1920: vx) claims that “it was of the greatest importance that America in this war should be represented not merely as a strong man fully armed, but as a strong man fully armed and believing in the cause for which he was fighting”. Again, there is the word ‘represented’ here; this shows that a particular image was being created to adhere to a particular agenda or motive, even if this was not a conscious intention. This analysis of Creel's book demonstrates that even whilst actively attempting to deny participation in propaganda, any attempt to influence the public inevitably makes the agent complicit in this act. Yet most importantly, his comments on German propagation during the war portray how the term was already beginning to develop an unpleasant aura in the early half of the Twentieth Century.

However, despite this early evidence of a negative connotation, it is still possible to see a semantic development in the term's usage over the succeeding years. Miller (2005: 10) argues that “while the word [propaganda] then [in 1842] *could* be used to make a sinister impression, it did not automatically evoke subversive falsehood, as it has done since the 1920s.” It is important to note the word ‘automatic’; it demonstrates that whilst a negative association with the term ‘propaganda’ was present historically (albeit under the surface) it gained popular recognition and greater prominence as the Twentieth Century grew into maturity, and became an instinctual and accepted conjunction. Moreover, Miller cites the 1920s as the pivotal moment in history where the mutation began to take place with vigour.

In order to map this (and to see if Miller was correct in his claim), I compiled a new word list of terms from the Oxford dictionary definitions which appeared to confirm Chomsky and Herman's theory of ‘corruption’, or that represented Haste's idea of secrecy, unreliability, and manipulation. This list consisted of the following: the abbreviation ‘derog.’ (derogatory); ‘misleading’; ‘rumour’; ‘biased’; ‘dishonest’;

‘tendentious’. These terms were entered into an advance search and again plotted using the concordance plot tool. The results can be viewed in Figure 5:

Concordance Hits 18		Total Plots 11
HIT FILE: 11	FILE: 1976 Concise.bt	No. of Hits = 1 File Length (in chars) = 194
HIT FILE: 12	FILE: 1982 Concise.bt	No. of Hits = 1 File Length (in chars) = 198
HIT FILE: 13	FILE: 1982 Supplement to the New English.bt	No. of Hits = 1 File Length (in chars) = 345
HIT FILE: 14	FILE: 1989 Oxford English second edition (full).bt	No. of Hits = 1 File Length (in chars) = 894
HIT FILE: 15	FILE: 1990 Concise.bt	No. of Hits = 1 File Length (in chars) = 251
HIT FILE: 16	FILE: 1993 Shorter.bt	No. of Hits = 2 File Length (in chars) = 416
HIT FILE: 17	FILE: 1995 Concise.bt	No. of Hits = 3 File Length (in chars) = 296
HIT FILE: 18	FILE: 1999 Concise.bt	No. of Hits = 2 File Length (in chars) = 230
HIT FILE: 19	FILE: 2002 Shorter.bt	No. of Hits = 2 File Length (in chars) = 416
HIT FILE: 20	FILE: 2004 Concise.bt	No. of Hits = 2 File Length (in chars) = 228
HIT FILE: 21	FILE: 2007 Shorter.bt	No. of Hits = 2 File Length (in chars) = 416

Figure 5: Concordance 2

The table shows that there are eighteen occurrences of these words throughout the editions; this number is significantly lower than the eighty-three religious terms which were found previously, using the same search method. Moreover, derogatory terms are only to be found in eleven out of the twenty-one editions. This demonstrates that the religious vocabulary is much more prevalent than the defamatory, and that it is recognised by the dictionaries for a much greater part of the Twentieth Century. What can be discerned, moreover, is a point where this critically negative terminology comes into use: the first occurrence is not until 1976 and from thereafter this negative lexicon is present in every fascicle. There would appear, then, to be a pivotal decade where the word’s misleading connotations became cemented. Significantly, the Vietnam War drew to a close in 1975, one year before the first allusion to fraudulency appeared under the term ‘propaganda’ in the Oxford English Dictionary. This confirms Herman and Chomsky’s ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ and supports the impact that social events have upon linguistic development. It could be argued that the Vietnam War played a large role in mutating social linguistic understanding of propaganda, but it appears equally likely that it was a

catalyst that cemented subtle changes that had been taking place in the common psyche for decades (since, for instance, the 1920s as Lippman suggests).

Yet whilst it is evident that there is the potential for manipulation involved in the act of propagation, this manipulation may not necessarily point to an act of evil or corruption on the part of the propagandist. Ellul (1973:36-37) states:

propaganda must respond to a need, whether it be a concrete need (bread, peace, security, work) or a psychological need. [...] The group must need something, and the propaganda must respond to that need.

Propaganda exists, then, because there is a demand for its existence. Take for an example the following extract from Vera Brittain's memoirs of the First World War (2014: 134):

They sound ludicrous enough now, these rumours, these optimisms, these assurances, to us who still wonder why, in spite of all our incompetence, we managed to 'win' the War. But at the time they helped us to live. I cannot, indeed, imagine how long we should have succeeded in living without them.

This passage speaks of the absolute necessity of the positive influence of public opinion, for civilians during the First World War needed to be fed encouraging reports for them to maintain morale and endure four years of suffering through warfare. If society did not need propaganda, then there would be no reason for official agencies to create it. Perhaps, then, propaganda is not necessarily evil but simply an evil necessity? It is inevitable, after all, that material will be generated that voices the essence of public emotion, but that also corresponds with official establishment objectives. This does not automatically render it deceptive or malevolent. Bernays (2005: 48) highlights this as he argues that "[I]n itself, the word *propaganda* has certain technical meanings which, like most things in this world, are 'neither good nor bad but custom makes them so.'" This is a crucial argument: the word itself does not demand a negative interpretation; it is the way it is perceived, and the way that it is utilised by society that informs this. Creel (1920: 402) builds on this when he states that "[N]o matter how honest its intent or pure its purpose, a Committee on Public Information operating in peace-times would be caught inevitably in the net of controversy". This shows the impossibility of avoiding criticism, yet perhaps also proves that propaganda is a necessity during war-time; it is a required weapon that helps achieve victory. On the other hand, Ellul (1973: xv) argues that "necessity never establishes legitimacy"; the need for propaganda does not absolve those who produce it.

Ellul (1973: 141) explores the necessity for propaganda during a period of conflict and claims it is due to man wanting "a profound and significant reason for what he does". In order for soldiers to die for their country, they must be made to believe that they do so for a purpose that transcends their individual self. This motivator could be something as candid as inspiring patriotism amongst citizens, or as manipulative as the spreading of outright lies to coerce a population. Although this line of enquiry is extremely interesting, the overall goal of this paper is not to ascertain whether propaganda is 'good' or 'bad',

but rather to track its evolution over time from a religious to a highly political and controversial context.

6. Conclusions

This paper does not, and cannot, provide an infallible answer as to how and when the term 'propaganda' began to mutate from a predominantly religious, innocent sense, to a loaded political interpretation. There are limitations due to the potential for differing definitions in alternative dictionary publications - only the Oxford English Dictionaries were used, whereas Webster's or Collins (for example) could produce a very different pattern, allowing for the possibility of divergent outcomes. There are limitations also due to differentiation within the Oxford English Dictionaries themselves; it was only the concise editions that made any reference to a political context. There is not the space within this paper to explore and discuss the differences between each dictionary in detail, moreover it would distract from the purpose of this work, but it is important to bear in mind these concerns when drawing conclusions from the data, and to understand that the results are by no means consummate. What this exploration does do, however, is to provide an indication of the way that the term has developed and changed over the Twentieth Century, with the side by side comparison of critical theorists and dictionary texts allowing a contrast between the social and the linguistic spheres.

It has been shown through the corpus statistics that the word was firmly rooted in a theological context and that even in contemporary dictionary editions this remained the case. However, in regards to a bureaucratic propaganda there was a disagreement between the results of these data searches and the quotation slips. Although this context does not appear in the dictionaries until the 1990s, there was evidence of its use much earlier in the century through the submitted slips from public readers. Perhaps the dictionaries did not manage to reflect the social psyche of the times, or perhaps this is an example of the limitations of a corpus-based analysis? Whichever the case, the gradual adoption of a political phraseology (whether that adoption happened in the 1920s or in the 1990s) does confirm a semantic evolution of the term.

Where this evolution is most evident, however, is in the growth of a derogatory context. This was not acknowledged by the dictionaries until the 1970s, and its prevalence thereafter points at a pivotal moment in time where the understanding of the word began to change. Even when compared side by side with the theorists, it was evident that a gradual understanding of an unfavourable sentiment towards propaganda was emerging; it is just the timeline of this emergence which is contested. Miller (2005: 9) claims that a shift took place around the 1920s as “prior to World War One, the word *propaganda* was little-used in English [...] and, back then, *propaganda* tended not to be the damning term we throw around today”. The conflict, according to Miller, put into motion the wheels of dissent. Bernays (2005: 55), too, commented on the nature of propaganda since the Great War stating that the “the practice of propaganda since the war has assumed very different forms from those prevalent twenty years ago. This new technique may fairly be called the new propaganda.” This ‘new propaganda’, Bernays argues, focuses on the “anatomy of society, with its interlocking group formations and loyalties.” He uses an example of housewives who believe manufactured foods to be unhealthy and therefore call for them

to be banned. Without organisation and vocalization, their cause will go nowhere; “whether they realise it or not, they call upon propaganda to organize and effectuate demand” (2005: 57). There are two vital observations here: firstly, Bernays refers to the First World War as a turning point, a pivotal era in time which changed the way that propaganda is not only perceived, but also the way that it functioned. This confirms Grant’s earlier claim of a propaganda that was altered due to the Great War of 1914. Indeed, this can be taken one step further: the occurrence of derogatory terms commencing in the 1970s and continuing into the late Twentieth and early Twenty-first Centuries can be correlated to the response of the public to the Cold and Vietnamese wars and the mutating effects that these conflicts, too, had upon the interpretation of the word. Certainly, Ellul (1973: 89) believed this as he argues that:

The first World War; the Russian revolution of 1917; Hitler’s revolution of 1933; the second World War; the further development of revolutionary wars since 1944 in China, Indochina, and Algeria, as well as the Cold War—each was a step in the development of modern propaganda.

He feels that *all* conflict is influential in shaping social lexicon, which is understandable when one recalls the focused way governments utilised propaganda to encourage populations and promote war motives.

The second observation to be taken from Bernay’s statement is his use of the phrase ‘new propaganda’. This implies not only a change in the term itself, but in fact a development in propaganda as a phenomenon. Not merely the word, but the thing also, has evolved. Ellul (1973: 25) confirms this theory when he states that “to view propaganda as still being what it was in 1850 is to cling to an obsolete concept of man and of the means to influence him; it is to condemn oneself to understand nothing about modern propaganda.” Modern propaganda is not the same entity it was one hundred years ago; the definition of the term has mutated *because* the phenomenon itself has mutated; it is a relational process.

There is undeniably a process of change undergone by the term. The influence of conflict and a shift in social context has altered irrevocably the sense of the word from how it appeared at the start of the Twentieth Century. Whilst it can be argued that there were many pivotal points throughout the last hundred years where these changes took place, what cannot be argued is that the propaganda recognised today is the same as that which existed in 1842 or 1914. Any attempt to apply modern day context to the propaganda of a historical era would, ironically, be an act of deception and corruption in itself.

I think it is important to acknowledge that what many authors wrote during the First World War *was* propaganda; it was produced with the intention of influencing public opinion and supporting official aims. However, when speaking of propaganda, it is crucial to differentiate between the modern, and the historic. The material produced by Wellington House belongs to the latter category; their work may have formed part of the cannon of writing that began to manipulate how propaganda was perceived (the First World War proving a pivotal moment in history where the understanding of propaganda began to alter) yet at the actual time of their writing the act of producing propaganda was a far more innocent undertaking than it eventually became.

Notes

*“All material is reprinted by permission of the Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press.”

1. Ellul (1973: 118).

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