

A Semiotic Analysis of Threat and Warning Symbols in George Orwell's Novel 1984

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Abstract:

In this paper, we will analyze the theoretical assumptions regarding threat and warning images, with the intention of outlining the productive tension installed between them. Semiotics deals with symbols in the form of text and pictures, and also with their underlying meaning. Hence, the study aims to clarify the differences between the two aspects from semiotic point of view by analyzing the novel 1984 and investigate their hidden meanings, in order to expose the deep meaning of the terms and to unravel its complexities along with the use of their features. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers adopt theory of Saussure of the signs and symbols (1915).

Keywords: Threat; Warning; Signifier; Signified

1-Introduction

Language is a means of communication that is used for accomplishing many functions. Language is used to express ideas, thoughts, and information (Foers and J. Jones, 1960, p. 122) allowing people to communicate via words, phrase and signs. Thus, the study of signs is called Semiotics; or as Eco (1976, p. 7) defines it " Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign"; signs, on the other hand, is everything that can indicate something else (ibid).

Threats and warnings are two types of speech acts. They have been studied linguistically, in which there are some studies (Kadhim, 2012; Ahmed, 2013; Sami, 2015) prove that there is an obvious tension between them. Launching from this confusing aspects, the study seeks to explore and clarify the nature of threat and warning aspects from a semiotic point of view in order to find out if the same tension is exit in threat and warning signs, by analyzing the signs and symbols that indicate the two aspects in George Orwell's novel 1984.

The study falls into five sections, the second section deals with aspects of threat and warning. The third talks about methodology of the study. The fourth section contains the analysis of the novel, as well as, presents the results and discussion. The last section clarifies the conclusion of the present study.

2. Threat and Warning Aspects

Both threat and warning are aspects can be performed in a variety of ways to achieve specific goals and purposes. As far as threat is concerned, a threat can be in the form of certain gestures and signs. Threat is unwanted incident occurred by a potential cause (Lund et al., 2011, p. 48). In general, threat causes physical and mental harm to the individual, which includes issues like threat of pain, torture, death, personal security or even a loss (Mackie and Eliot Smith, 2003, p. 199). In this respect, Krampen (1987, p.31) refers to the purpose of using certain threatening signs; he maintains that a threatening sign spares sign producer the trouble of enacting the threat. Although s/he might not be serious, the sign producer expects the threatened person to be submitted to the given condition.

Moreover, a symbolic threat isthreatening the ingroup's identity, values, beliefs, norms, and way of life; it can evoke strong negative emotions, including fear, anger, hatred, frustration, and insecurity (Stepha, 2009, p. 1). Symbolic threats are perceived by group of people different in their belief, value or norms that may threat ingroup's way of life (Deaux and Mark Snyder, 2012, p.551). Leech (1983, pp. 104-105) mentions that threat is a conflictive where its illocutionary goal conflicts with the social goal. The result of such a conflict is negative.

Pragmatically speaking, threats depend on the perlocutionary acts that playan important role in the context. They drive their meaning from the contexts in which theyare used, where contexts in retune are determined by the communicative goals (Sami, 2015 .p 43). Thus, in thisway, threat is pragmatically motivated (Habermas and Cooke, 1998, pp. 274-278). Therefore, a symbol of threat is better to be understood by referring to its context where it occurred, in which its interpretation changed with the context (Krampen, 1987 p. 32).

On the other flip, warning somebody involves pulling one's attention towards apossible danger. From a semiotic point of view, warning signs represent objects ofinterpretation, things or events. They help warn someone from certain consequences throughsignaling, diagramming and drawings (Clarke, 1990, p. 1). Warning symbols can be descriptive which indicates the existence of a hazard, prescriptive which specifies the action to be taken in association with the hazard and prescriptive which indicates which behavior should not occur (Stanton, 1998, p. 225). A warning symbol can be achieved depending on the perlocutionary, when the symbol of warning exits the perlocutionary act exists also by scaring the addressee and making him run away. That is to say, the symbol of warning is persuasive. Its success depends on the H's understanding to the (perlocution), if so, the action will be achieved securely (Loxley,2007, p. 19).

Pragmatically speaking, Roeser (2010, p. 77) refers to a effective warning with all its types, saying that: An effective warning needs to communicate the risk and consequences of the prohibition behavior on an emotional level as well as on a rational level, with due regard to cognitive and linguistic abilities of various age and cultural groups exposed to the warning. Such warning can be effective in reducing injuries, and although the reasons for variability in the effectiveness of warning noted previously is not known, it is possible that a key factor is the emotional content of a warning.

2. Methodology

Signs and symbols are the heart of the semiotic's concerns. Concerning signs represent meaning which can be in deferent forms, or as Chandler (2007, p. 13) says "Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning". Everything can be a sing if it stands for something other than its literary meaning (ibid). As far as symbols areconcerned, they have the same meaning of signs or have a synonymsmeaning (Nöth, 1990,p. 115). According to Barr(2004, p. 18) "A symbolis a person, place, event, or object that has a special meaning",thus, symbols are a class of signs (ibid, p. 116).In literary context, the authors use symbols as synonymy of a signifier of sign, so, a sign is then " a symbol in its aspect as a verbal representative of a natural object or concept" (ibid). For instance, the symbol "Time is money" is a symbol that warns one that when you spend your time, you spend many opportunity to do something else just as when you spend your money and you give up your chance to do something else with this money; money like time are not infinite.

In accordance with what has been illustrated above, the researcher will adopt the theory of Saussure to analyze the signs and symbols of threat and warning in the novel; a semiotic analysis of the terms threat and warning includes an investigation of their hidden meanings, in order to expose the deep meaning of the terms and to unravel its complexities along with the use threat and warning features.

According to the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959, p. 67) a sign is composed of a **signifier** and **signified**. Signifier refers to the form which the sign takes and signified refers to the concept that the sign represents (ibid). The association of signifier and signifier results the signs and this relationship is called **signification** (Chandler, 2007, p. 20). In analyzing a literary signs, denotation and connotation are terms described the signifier and its signified, in which denotation is beyond the literary meaning whereas connotation is the opposite (ibid, p. 83).

4. Novel Analysis and Results

The following symbols have been taken from the novel 1984 by George Orwell:

4.1 1984

1984 is the title of the novel written with the purpose not as a prediction but warning readers of the dangers of totalitarian government. The signified presented as a title or a regular date but the signifier is a warning message since the novel had been written in 1949 but the writer named the novel 1984 as an imaginary future because his intention is to warn others from totalitarianism.

4.2 Big Brother;

**It was one of those pictures which are so contrived
that the eyes follow you about when you move.
BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the
caption beneath it ran. (p, 1)**

At the begging of the story, the main character Winston sees posters showing a man gazing down over the words “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” everywhere he goes. Big Brother is the leader behind the great power of the Party, in turn; he is the leader of Oceania. According to Saussure's theory, Big Brother is the signifier which indicates a nice man who loves and helps his family; the signified of this symbol is a threat since Big Brother symbolizes an open threat that no one can escape his gaze therefore no one can break his rules. Besides, the name itself represents irony since the name of Big Brother should be a kind person but we find the opposite in this novel.

4.3 The Telescreens

**There was no place where you could be
more certain that the telescreens were
watched continuously. (p, 62)**

The telescreens are everywhere, at home, office and bars. The signifier of these telescreens is regular T.V present news. However, the signified is a threat since they have hidden mikes and security camera-like devices are used by the dictator of Oceania to prevent anyone in his realm from forming conspiracies with others against the government. Also they are symbolize how totalitarian government abuses technology for its own benefits instead of exploiting its knowledge to improve civilization.

4.4 The Rats and Room 101

**I wouldn't confess, nothing! Just tell me
what it is and I'll confess straight off. Write it
down and I'll sign it — anything! Not room
101!" Room 101,' said the officer. (p, 138)**

The symbols of rats appear many times: firstly, appeared in the room of Mr. Charrington when Winston met Julia. The signifier of the rats is a regular small animal but the signified in this scene is a warning since rats represents a horror for Winston, revealing that he is more afraid of rats than anything else; so the rats in this room represent a warning sign for Winston from the horror in which this room will bring to him.

The second scene is in the room 101. The room 101 represents the worst thing could happen to anyone, where the prisoner faces his/ her own worst nightmare that breaking down their resistance. The signified in this scene for Winston is a threat since they represent his worst fear, in which Mr. O'Brien has threatened Winston with.

4.5 The Ministry of Love

The Ministry of Love was the really frightening one. There were no windows in it at all. (p, 4)

Ministry of love is a place where there are no windows. The signified indicate it as a ministry where there is happiness, love, peace but the results of its actions are exactly opposite to the meaning of its name which is also indicate irony. The signifier is a threat since it is a place where people are taken to be tortured via many ways bullying, brainwashing and forcibly and through. Simply, it is an organization of terror and horror that force and obligate people to love the party.

4.6 Child Hero

Child hero'was the phrase generally used — had overheard some compromising remark and denounced its parents to the Thought Police. (p, 14)

The signified of this sign or symbol is a child who does good things that make him a hero in his parents' eyes. The signifier represents a threat because this name is used for a child who turns his own parents into criminals for committing a thoughtcrime. Once he notices that his parents start to think, he tells the thought police about them; therefore, they represent threat to their parents. Also this symbol indicates irony since the name indicates something and in the novel indicates something else.

4.7 Darkness

We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness.' It was said very quietly, almost casually — a statement, not a command. (p, 14)

The phrase "the place where there is no darkness" is repeated many times. First seen when Winston imagines meeting O'Brien in "a place where there is no darkness". Then when he met O'Brien alone in his office, O'Brien told him we shall meet again and Winston complete and says "in a place where there is no darkness". The signified of the darkness is a place without light. The signifier indicates a warning symbol for Winston since eventually the place with no darkness is the ministry of love (a ministry with no windows) where he tortured. Therefore, we can say that O'Brien warned Winston indirectly and this is why he said "Even I told you," said O'Brien, "that if we met again it would be here" (p. 141).

4.8 "Imagine a boot stamping on a human face"

If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face — for ever.’(p, 156)

This is a description of an image which is said by O'Brien describing a picture of the future. The signified indicates abuses and a horrible image. The signifier refers to a warning message from the writer to the reader about the terrible nature of the totalitarian government, which he indirectly describes it as everything that gives meaning to life will be crushed beneath the heel of the totalitarian.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, linguistically the analysis shows that there are obvious differences between the two aspects. It is easier to indicate the images of threat and warning than in performative utterances because they are more complicated. Moreover, it has been noticed that most of threat symbols are ironic where the signified indicates something totally different from signifier as appeared in the image of "child hero". Furthermore, it has been noticed that threat images indicate negative consequences that may occur for the hearer, whereas, warning images indicate a warning message for the hearer about a negative future action which can be avoided. The aim for warning images is something for hearer's benefit, but threat is something for speaker's benefit.

From a literature point of view, the use of symbolism is a very helpful technique in creating indications about the future. The novelist uses them to show a picture of the results of a totalitarian government as a warning message for the readers.

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